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Rahul's composed century guides Karnataka to semifinal berth

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SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

ساڈھ روزنامہ بنگلور

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Delhi cops file FIR over ex-army chief's book 'leak'

NEW DELHI, 9 FEB

Delhi Police has taken cognisance of information on social media platforms and news forums claiming that a pre-print copy of the book 'Four Stars of Destiny' is being circulated and Special Cell has filed a case into the "purported leak/breach of a yet to be approved publication". Delhi Police officials said that an investigation has been taken up on the claims of availability of pre-print copy of the book. The pre-print book 'Four Stars of Destiny' has been authored by former army chief NN Naravane. A polce official said that it had taken note of claims on internet that the book was yet to get necessary clearance of relevant authorities. Excerpts of the book were carried by some reputed magazines. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi attempted to cite them in Parliament, triggering a major row. *—ANI*

Lamborghini crashes into pedestrians in UP

KANPUR, 9 FEB

An FIR has been registered against an unidentified driver after a Lamborghini, allegedly driven by the son of tobacco businessman KK Mishra, rammed into pedestrians on VIP Road in Gwaltoli. The incident left at least six injured, with victims suffering fractures and bruises; all have been discharged from hospital. Witnesses said the car first hit an autorickshaw, then a stationary motorcycle, flinging its rider into the air. The police are examining CCTV footage and have seized the luxury vehicle, valued at over Rs 10 crore, for inspection. No arrests have been made yet. *—PTI*

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Wangchuk's health is perfectly good: Centre to SC

NEW DELHI, 9 FEB

The Centre informed the Supreme Court that climate activist Sonam Wangchuk is in a "perfectly good" condition and receiving the best treatment at AIIMS Jodhpur while in custody.

Justice Kumar asked if any review had been conducted of Wangchuk's detention. Additional Solicitor General KM Nataraj replied, "Nothing has been done as of now. He is getting the best of treatment." The court will hear the habeas corpus plea on Wednesday. *—PTI*

India announces USD 175M aid to Seychelles

NEW DELHI, 9 FEB

India announced a development assistance package of USD 175 million for Seychelles after Prime Minister Narendra Modi held talks with President Patrick Herminie. The two leaders discussed expanding cooperation in sustainability, trade, economy, and security. Modi highlighted the strong historic and trust-based relations, stating, "India and Seychelles are connected not just by geography, but by history, trust and a shared vision for the future." The package will support projects in social housing, mobility, vocational training, health, defence, and maritime security, strengthening the bilateral relationship. *—PTI*

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Oppn to move no confidence motion against LS Speaker

'Birla is biased for not letting Rahul speak'

NEW DELHI, 9 FEB

The Opposition is considering moving a no confidence Motion to remove Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla from office. Sources said on Monday that Birla has been preventing people from speaking in the Lok Sabha, and noted that he barred Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi and others from addressing the House on the Motion of Thanks to the President's address.

As many as 103 MPs, including those from the Congress, DMK and Samajwadi Party, had signed a notice for moving the resolution, sources said. A final decision on when to give the notice against the Speaker would be taken on Tuesday.

They added that a notice for the resolution is likely to be given under Article 94-C of the Constitution to the Lok Sabha Secretary General.

Other issues include not initiating action against BJP MP Nishikant Dubey for his unsubstantiated charges against women MPs of the Congress, and suspension of eight opposition MPs, the sources said.

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju, however, quipped that the Opposition may bring the resolution, but they don't have the numbers.

Meanwhile Gandhi, TMC's Abhishek Banerjee, Samajwadi Party's Akhilesh Yadav and DMK's TR Baalu, met Birla soon after the Lok Sabha was adjourned for the day on Monday, to work out a solution and end the stalemate. The House has not been functioning properly after Gandhi was barred from speaking on the India-China issue last week. Gandhi was supposed to speak on former army chief MM Naravane's unpublished book.

Addressing press, Gandhi dismissed Rijiju's claims that a dozen of Opposition MP's threatened Prime Minister Narendra Modi before the latter was scheduled to speak in the House. He dared the BJP to file an FIR against the people if the incident actually took place.

"The fact is very clear the Prime Minister was scared to come to the House not because of the members but because of what I was saying and he is still scared because he cannot face the truth," he said.

Meanwhile, Opposition MPs walked out of the Rajya Sabha after the leader of Opposition in the Upper House Mallikarjun Kharge was not allowed to speak.

During the Question Hour, Kharge wanted to raise the issue of Gandhi being barred from speaking. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

Tejasvi detained in Jayanagar when protesting Metro hike

BENGALURU, 9 FEB

BJP MP Tejasvi Surya was briefly detained for protesting at Jayanagar Metro station demanding affordable public transport in the City, police said on Monday.

Surya, who is also the Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha (BJYM) national president, was protesting against the proposed fare hike of between Rs 1 and Rs 5, which has now been put on hold. Surya claimed that the Centre was behind it, but the State government said it was responsible for the pause.

The Bengaluru South MP was protesting with an empty trunk, as if to say that the State government's promises are empty trunk. It was also a response to Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar calling Surya an "empty trunk".

After being released later in the day, Surya lashed out at the Congress government on X: "Shameful that the Congress government arrested me for exposing the truth: That this is a 'Khali Trunk' Govt. That Karnataka's finances are broken, and citizens are paying the price through rising Metro fares and soaring costs."

However, Home Minister G Parameshwara said that police asked Surya to protest at Freedom Park and not near Jayanagar Metro station.

Parameshwara said that Metro was run jointly by both the Centre and the State.

"We have to work together. It's not blaming each other. Whenever there is a rise in the fare, I think it has to be a collective decision. Now, why is one-upmanship going on?" he asked. *—Agencies*

BJP MP Tejasvi Surya holds a 'khali (empty) trunk' to protest Karnataka's financial state at Jayanagar Metro station, on Monday *—MOHAMMED ASAD*

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Smoke and fire after armed miscreants allegedly set fire to houses, at Litan Sareikhong village, in Ukhrul district of Manipur on Monday *—PTI*

Violence in Manipur again; houses burnt

IMPHAL, 9 FEB

Violence broke out in Manipur's Ukhrul district on Monday after armed people allegedly set fire to houses in Litan Sareikhong village, officials said.

Armed groups also fired several rounds in the air near the hill village, forcing residents to flee to safer areas in Kangpokpi district. Several Tangkhul villagers were also reported to have left the area.

Violence first started in the area on Saturday night after a Tangkhul Naga community member was allegedly assaulted by seven to eight persons at Litan village.

The matter was settled by the victim's side and the chief of Litan Sareikhong, and both parties agreed to resolve the issue, with a meeting scheduled for Sunday, the officials said.

However, the meeting did not take place. Instead, a group of villagers from Sikibung allegedly launched an attack on the residence of the chief of Litan Sareikhong, they said.

Around midnight on Monday, several houses of Tangkhul Nagas were set on fire at Litan Sareikhong, allegedly by Kuki militants.

A few houses of those belonging to the Kuki community were also torched nearby, officials said. Tangkhul is the largest Naga tribe in Manipur.

Manipur Chief Minister Y Khemchand Singh said on Monday that his government will ensure the security of everyone belonging to the Kuki-Zo community visiting Imphal. *— PTI*

Will not allow impediments in SIR in Bengal: Supreme Court

NEW DELHI, 9 FEB

The Supreme Court on Monday said it would not allow anyone to create impediments in the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in West Bengal, amid Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's concerns over "mass exclusion" of voters.

Hearing a batch of petitions, including one filed by Banerjee, a bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and NV Anjaria said it would issue necessary orders or clarifications to ensure the exercise proceeds smoothly.

"We will not allow anyone to create any impediment in the SIR exercise. It must be clear to the States," the Chief Justice said.

The bench took note of an Election Commission affidavit alleging that notices issued during the revision were burnt by miscreants, and directed the West Bengal Director General of Police to file an affidavit, noting that no FIR has been registered so far.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre, said, "A message must go that the Constitution of India applies to all States."

The court noted the State had given the EC a list of 8,505 Group B officers for training and deployment. It said revisions would be decided by electoral roll officers alone. *—PTI*

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SC sends Sengar back to HC in custodial death case

The SC on Monday asked the Delhi High Court to hear expelled BJP leader Kuldeep Singh Sengar's plea challenging his conviction in the custodial death case of the Unnao rape survivor's father and decide within three months. The apex court was hearing his plea challenging the HC's order that refused to quash his 10-year term.

SC terms Rs 54,000 cr digital fraud as 'dacoity'

The SC on Monday described the siphoning of over Rs 54,000 crore by digital frauds as absolute "robbery or dacoity" and asked the Centre to draft a standard operating procedure in consultation with stakeholders to deal with such cases. The Ministry of Home Affairs then formed a panel to probe digital arrests

SC upholds order limiting Islamic prayers on Madurai hilltop

The Supreme Court on Monday upheld a Madras High Court's decision prohibiting animal sacrifice and granting Muslim devotees limited rights to prayers on the Thiruparankundram hills in Tamil Nadu's Madurai. The petitioner claimed that the order violated the right to freedom of religion. The high court had permitted prayers and gatherings in the Nellithoppu area during Bakrid and Ram

SIX KILLED IN SEPARATE ROAD ACCIDENTS IN STATE

BIDAR/KOLAR, 9 FEB

Six people were killed and over a dozen injured in two separate road accidents in Bidar and Kolar districts in Karnataka on Sunday, police said on Monday.

In Bidar, three members of a family died on the spot after the motorcycle they were travelling rammed into a bridge near Naganna Cross, close to Hallikheda, in Humnabad taluk.

The deceased were Venkat Karatmal, 40, his wife Shilpa, 35, and their daughter Rakshita,12, residents of Rajeshwar village. Their son Digambar, 15, who was also on the motorcycle, sustained serious injuries and was admitted.

In Kolar district, three labourers were killed when a Bolero vehicle carrying about 15 daily-wage workers overturned near Doddamaladoddi village in Srinivaspur taluk on Sunday evening. The victims were identified as Venkatamma, 55, Muniyappa, 56 and Seenu, 27, all residents of Chemmakuru village in Andhra Pradesh.

Police said the labourers were returning home after plucking tamarind in Chintamani taluk when the driver allegedly lost control due to brake failure while crossing a railway track.

More than 10 injured persons were admitted to hospitals. *—Salar with Agencies*

FROM CASH DEPOSITS TO VEHICLES

Draft I-T Rules raises threshold for PAN

NEW DELHI, 9 FEB

The Draft Income Tax Rules have proposed significantly raising transaction limits for quoting of PAN for cash deposits/withdrawal in banks, purchase of motor vehicles and property, and payment of hotel bills.

The rules have also expanded the list of Category 1 metropolitan cities to include Bengaluru, Pune, Ahmedabad, and Hyderabad for the purpose of claiming house rent allowance (HRA). Taxpayers in big metros, like Chennai, Delhi, Kolkata and Mumbai, are eligible for a 50 per cent HRA exemption, while taxpayers in other urban centres can claim a 40 per cent exemption.

The draft also proposes making it mandatory for crypto exchanges to share information with the Tax Department. It also includes Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC) as an accepted mode of payment.

For the purchase of motor vehicles, including motorcycles, Permanent Account Number (PAN) will be required only if the transaction value exceeds Rs 5 lakh. Currently, PAN is mandatory for all motor vehicle purchases, while two-wheelers are not covered under existing rules.

Quoting PAN will be mandatory for making cash deposits or withdrawals totalingRs 10 lakh or more in a financial year. Currently, PAN is required for cash deposits exceeding Rs 50,000 on a day.

The threshold for quoting PAN on hotel and restaurant bills and events has been proposed at Rs 1 lakh, up from Rs 50,000. In property transactions, PAN will be mandatory if the transaction value exceeds Rs 20 lakh, compared to the current Rs 10 lakh. The Income Tax Act, 2025, will be implemented on 1 April. *—PTI*

Techie from K'taka shot dead in Canada

OTTAWA/BENGALURU, 9 FEB

A 37-year-old Indian-Canadian IT professional was shot dead by unidentified assailants in the parking lot of a busy shopping centre in Toronto, police said. The Toronto Police Service identified the victim as Chandan Kumar Raja Nandakumar of Brampton, originally from Karnataka.

Nandakumar's parents, who live in Thyamagondlu village on the outskirts of Bengaluru, said "we had been telling him to come back as it has been six to seven years since he left for Canada, but he did not listen," his father, Nanda Kumar, said. His mother claimed Chandan had recently formed a Kannada association in Toronto and suspected this may have triggered hostility. The family has appealed to the Indian goverment to help bring his body back for last rites.

Police said the shooting occurred around 3.31pm on Saturday at a shopping centre. Officers found him with gunshot wounds and rushed him to hospital, where he later died. The suspects fled the scene in a vehicle.

Police said the incident is believed to be targeted and not random. *—PTI*

DGP issues guidelines to stop 'mechanical' FIRs on social media

BENGALURU, 9 FEB

Director General of Police and Inspector General of Police (DGP and IGP) MA Saleem has issued a fresh set of guidelines on the registration of FIRs related to social media posts, observing that they are being registered "mechanically, without undertaking preliminary enquiries".

A circular was issued by the office of the DGP and IGP on 7 February, officials said on Monday.

Police must follow specific guidelines when registering an FIR, including verification of locus standi, conducting preliminary enquiries in cognizable offences, and treating defamation as a non-cognizable offence, the circular said.

"Automatic or mechanical arrests are impermissible, and the principle of proportionality in the exercise of criminal process must be observed," it said.

It stated that before registering any FIR for alleged defamation or similar offences, the police must verify whether the complainant qualifies as the "person aggrieved" under the law.

"Complaints by unrelated third parties lacking standing are not maintainable, except where the report concerns a

cognizable offence," the guideline cited in the circular stated.

In cases where a representation or complaint discloses a cognizable offence, police must, conduct a preliminary enquiry to determine whether the alleged offences are prima facie made out.

On cases alleging promotion of enmity, intentional insult, public mischief, threat to public order, or sedition, police must see if there exists prima facie material for incitement to violence, hatred, or public disorder.

"This threshold must be applied in line with the principles laid down in Kedar Nath Singh vs State of Bihar, 1962, and Shreya Singhal vs Union of India, 2015," the circular stated. For political speeches, the police shall obtain prior legal opinion from the Public Prosecutor before filing an FIR, provided the alleged offense is not found to be "frivolous". —*PTI*

PHOTO: FREEPIK

KIA customs arrest two for smuggling ganja worth Rs 2 cr

BENGALURU, 9 FEB

Customs officials at the Kempegowda International Airport in the City have arrested two passengers in separate incidents for allegedly smuggling hydroponic ganja worth over Rs 2 crore, officials said on Monday. In the first case on 7 February, Bengaluru Customs intercepted a passenger who had arrived from Bangkok and seized 1.8kg of hydroponic ganja valued at Rs 63 lakh. The contraband was concealed in a false-bottom suitcase, the customs officials said on X. In another instance on 6 February, a passenger arriving from Hong Kong was intercepted at the Bengaluru airport and 5.05kg of hydroponic anja worth Rs 1.76 crore was seized from checked-in baggage. Both the accused were arrested under the provisions of the NDPS Act, officials added. —*PTI*

4 held for assault over festival donation in Bidar

BIDAR, 9 FEB

Four arrested for an attack on a photo studio owner in Mailoor locality in Bidar after a dispute over a forced donation for Maha Shivaratri event. Mahesh Biradar, who runs a photo studio near Mailoor Cross in Bidar, was assaulted along with his brother Sachin, Vishnu, and Rohit. On 7 February, seven to eight individuals demanded money from Sachin; when refused, they verbally abused and attacked him. Mahesh, upon arriving, questioned the assailants, who then attacked him and stabbed him in the neck, causing serious injuries. Mahesh stated the attack was with intent to kill. A case has been filed at Gandhiganj Police Station under relevant sections. Police arrested Krishna, Narendra, Kiran, and Nikhil, and warned the public that those who cause trouble in any manner will face strict legal action.—*SALAR NEWS*

PHOTO: FREEPIK

Fire breaks out at four scrap shops in Mysuru

MYSURU, 9 FEB

A fire erupted at four scrap shops at Kesare on the outskirts of Mysuru, prompting a swift response from fire services. No casualties or nearby residences were reported. The shops, located off Old Kesare Road in Mysuru, stored used materials like plastic, foam, and wood both outside and inside. Combustible items such as tyres, empty bottles, and boxes containing perfumes and paints likely fuelled the rapid spread. The fire, which started in a copper shop, spread to others over nearly two acres near the Mysuru–Bengaluru highway. Regional Fire Officer Chandan stated the blaze may have originated from an 'unscientific' method of burning electric wires to extract copper. The fire was extinguished after seven hours. The police registered a case and initiated an investigation to ascertain the fire's cause.—*SALAR NEWS*

State, not Centre paused Metro fare hike: DKS

DyCM says cost is high, BMRCL will recalculate fares

BENGALURU, 9 FEB

- Prices were set to rise by Rs 1 to Rs 5 across 10 zones. Then, on Saturday, BJP MP Tejasvi Surya announced that the fare hike was put on hold on the instructions of Union Minister Manohar Lal Khattar

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said in Bengaluru on Monday that it was the State government, not the Centre, which put the Namma Metro fare hike on hold. On Thursday, the Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Limited (BMRCL) had said that Metro fares would be revised on a zone-by-zone basis starting 9 February as part of its annual automatic fare adjustment system.

Prices were set to rise by Rs 1 to Rs 5 across 10 zones. Then, on Saturday, BJP MP Tejasvi Surya announced that the fare hike was put on hold on the instructions of Union Minister Manohar Lal Khattar.

The official confirmation only came on Sunday. However, Shivakumar said in Bengaluru: "The decision to put the fare hike on hold was made by the Karnataka Government; the Central government has no role in this."

Addressing a press conference in the City, Shivakumar said that BMRCL fare increase is based on a formula - OMR cost, existing cost based on CPI, energy cost.

"Based on this, I have directed them to come up with a revised fare…. The cost is very high. I have asked them to recalculate."

In an apparent jab at the Union government, he said that in "Delhi, for example, security and other things are taken care of by the Central government."

He said that the Fee Fixation Committee (FFC) had worked out the formula based on the above and expenditure. Shivakumar's comments come after the Congress claimed that it had no authority over the FFC, which it said was chaired by someone appointed by the Centre.

The Committee has maintained that it is duty-bound to hike the fares annually. However, the BJP has said that the State government asked for the FFC to be constituted.

"All Bangalore Metro tenders are called and monitored by the State government," LoP R Ashoka noted.

—*Salar News with Agencies*

SIT probing 9-page note in CJ Roy's case

BENGALURU, 9 FEB

The SIT probing the alleged suicide of Confident Group chairman CJ Roy is examining multiple papers and documents seized during the investigation, including a nine-page note purportedly written by the real estate baron in red ink, police said on Monday.

"We are currently examining several papers and documents obtained from Roy's family members and associates, including nine pages of notes suspected to have been written by him in red ink," a senior police officer said. The various issues mentioned in the note are under examination, but details cannot be disclosed at this stage, the officer added.

The case is presently registered as an unnatural death report, while the angle of abetment to suicide has not yet been taken up, the office said.

Statements of people connected to Roy are being recorded as part of the probe, he added.

Sources also said Roy had been consulting a psychiatrist, indicating that he was under stress.

The founder and chairman of Confident Group allegedly died by suicide on 30 January after sustaining bullet injuries from his licensed firearm at his office near Richmond Circle in the City. The incident occurred when Income Tax (IT) officials from Kerala were questioning him, following searches conducted over the previous three days. Roy had been under the IT department's scanner since December.

Details of the multiple raids that took place since are yet to be made public, and it unclear whether the SIT has questioned the Income Tax officials. —*PTI*

Final call on IPL at Chinnaswamy this week: KSCA Prez

State Home Minister G Parameshwara, KSCA Chief and former cricketer Venkatesh Prasad and others at the Minister's Sadashivanagar residence in Bengaluru on Monday — X @DRPARAMESHWARA

BENGALURU, 9 FEB

Karnataka State Cricket Association (KSCA) and the Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) representatives met Home Minister G Parameshwara to discuss permission for hosting the Indian Premier League (IPL) matches at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bengaluru.

Former India cricketer and KSCA President Venkatesh Prasad said that Parameshwara was supportive and promised to schedule another meeting with his committee on 12 February to finalise the decision.

In Bengaluru, Parameshwara said KSCA and RCB have been granted conditional permission for IPL matches, but a final decision will be made on Wednesday after discussions with BBMP, police, and legal officials, taking into account all pros and cons.

"The IPL matches are approaching. We have given a conditional permission. I gave them time until Wednesday. We are calling the BBMP commissioner, the Police Commissioner, and the law representatives. We will take a call and discuss all pros and cons before taking a decision," the Parameshwara said.

Cricket at the stadium was suspened since June, 2025 after 11 people died and several were injured in a stampede during RCB's IPL title celebration. —*ANI*

4 cops removed over illegal activities in Yadgir

YADGIR, 9 FEB

The Yadgir district police have suspended two of its assistant sub-inspectors (ASIs) and two police constables—for failing to curb ongoing illegal operations in various parts of Surpur city.

The suspended personnel have been identified as ASIs Ningappa and Balaram and police constables Tayanna and Lakshman in Yadgir. They will remain under suspension until the completion of the departmental inquiry.

The action was taken following complaints by the public, elected representatives, and various organisations regarding the increasing activities of illegal mining and transportation of sand along riverbanks in the city and the subsequent loss of government revenue and severe environmental damage.

SP Prithvik Shankar had issued strict instructions to curb such illegal activities, including gambling and other unlawful activities. However, since a few police personnel failed to take action and arrest the guilty, the Police Department initiated disciplinary proceedings against them.

"Illegal activities will not be tolerated under any circumstances. Protecting public trust is a primary responsibility of the Police. Anyone who fails to follow instructions, will be liable to face strict action," SP Shankar warned. —*SALAR NEWS*

'YETTINAHOLE DRINKING WATER WILL REACH CHIKKABALLAPURA IN 1 YEAR'

CHIKKABALLAPURA, 9 FEB

State Higher Education Minister MC Sudhakar — SALAR

Drinking water from the ambitious Yettinahole project will reach Chikkaballapura district by next year, bringing much-needed relief to the residents facing an acute drinking water crisis, district in-charge Minister and Higher Education Minister Dr MC Sudhakar said on Monday.

Speaking at a meeting in Chikkaballapura, he said the government aims to distribute 30,000 land ownership certificates under the Revenue Village Campaign, giving legal status to families living in undocumented settlements, many of whom still lack permanent housing.

Authorities are identifying habitations with at least 10 houses through coordinated efforts of the Revenue, Panchayat, and Survey departments.

Chikkaballapura has 1,522 revenue villages, of which 344 are classified as revenue villages, sub-villages or hamlets. By the end of this month or early March, benefits such as land subdivision approvals, e-Pavati khata certificates will be distributed. —*Salar News*

Enormous balloon flying over KIA caused fear on 5 Jan: Cops

BENGALURU, 9 FEB

The balloon bearing the name "BCD Construction" was found flying unauthorisedly in the operational area of the airport in Bengaluru — SCREENGRAB

A humongous balloon used for advertisement purpose was flown unauthorisedly inside the restricted operational area of Kempegowda International Airport (KIA), which was a serious breach of aviation safety norms and raised security concerns, police said on Monday.

The incident took place on 5 January, but the complaint was lodged only on 8 February by L Nagendran from the Aviation Security Group (ASG) of the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF), police said.

A balloon bearing the name "BCD Construction" was found flying unauthorisedly in the operational area of KIA in the City, Nagendran stated in the complaint.

Upon noticing this, "the ASG/BDDS personnel immediately intercepted and checked it. It was found that the balloon was present in the Red Zone/No Flying Area of KIA (as per DGCA guidelines)".

The FIR said that the act amounted to a violation of DGCA guidelines within the prohibited area of the airport.

Police said a case has been registered and further investigation into the incident is under way. —*PTI*

FARM-TO-CUP FRAMEWORK

Int'l coffee fest to kick off at Jayamahal

BENGALURU, 9 FEB

The three-day 2026 edition of India International Coffee Festival, structured around the concept of 'a farm-to-cup framework' is scheduled to begin here on 12 February at the City's Chamara Vajra, Jayamahal.

The farm-to-cup framework seeks to offer the visitors insights into production, processing, roasting, and brewing through curated tastings, workshops, and cupping sessions during the festival.

The festival is being held with the support of the Specialty Coffee Association of India (SCAI), Coffee Board of India and presented by NESCAFA, Nestle India, officials said on Monday adding that the festival is expected to attract over 20,000 visitors.

Addressing a press conference in Bengaluru, Kurma Rao M, CEO and Secretary, Coffee Board of India termed the India International Coffee Festival (IICF) as the country's only dedicated coffee festival.

"Indian coffee is gaining recognition for its quality and diversity. Platforms such as IICF play an important role in connecting producers with markets, encouraging best practices, and supporting the long-term growth of both domestic consumption and exports," Rao told reporters here.

He said IICF 2026 will convene coffee growers, processors, exporters, roasters, equipment manufacturers, cafe brands, baristas, and consumers. The festival focuses on collaboration, knowledge exchange, innovation, and market access at a time when India's coffee sector is transitioning towards quality-led growth. IICF organiser and SCAI president Hamsini Appadurai said, "This edition of IICF reflects that shift with greater scale and deeper business engagement. —*PTI*

IICF is the country's only dedicated coffee festival — IICF

Belagavi official plants spy cam to extort senior

BELAGAVI, 9 FEB

Malmaruti police under the Belagavi Police Commissionerate have arrested a government employee for allegedly conspiring to defame and extort money from his senior woman officer by installing hidden cameras inside her residence. Police said the motive was professional rivalry.

The accused, Vinod T, a subordinate officer, allegedly colluded with a group posing as journalists to obtain compromising private footage of the officer, who heads a district unit of a government department in Belagavi. The footage was allegedly intended to be used for blackmail, with the extorted money shared among the conspirators.

"Vinod was arrested after interrogation of the accused posing as journalists," CP Bhushan Borase said. Investigators found multiple covert cameras concealed inside bulb holders at the officer's residence.

Malmaruti PI BN Gaddekar said Vinod approached the fake journalists with the plan and facilitated their access to the residence. The group reportedly planned to use the extorted money for personal gain, including building a house.

The woman officer stated in her complaint that the accused initially demanded Rs 1 crore, later reducing it to Rs 50 lakh. He was produced before a magistrate and remanded to judicial custody. Bail pleas of the other accused have been rejected. —*SALAR NEWS*

Birla under BJP pressure: Cong women MPs

The MPs claim that Speaker is unfairly defending Modi's 'non-appearance' in Lok Sabha

NEW DELHI, 9 FEB

Congress's women MPs in the Lok Sabha wrote to Speaker Om Birla on Monday, claiming that under pressure from the ruling party to defend the "non-appearance" of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, he made grave allegations against them.

They urged the Speaker to act as an impartial custodian of the Lower House.

Their letter to the Speaker comes days after Birla stated in the House that he had "concrete information" that many Congress members might move towards Prime Minister Modi's seat and carry out "some unexpected act" as a result of which he had requested him not to come to the House to reply to the discussion on the Motion of Thanks on the President's address.

Speaking about the letter signed by her, along with other women MPs of the Congress, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra said, "There is so much pressure on the Speaker which is not right. There is no question of anyone raising a hand on the PM or do anything like this. There are 11 women MPs, they are all serious MPs."

"He (Birla) should not have made the statement, he has been pressured to say it by the government and that is why he made the statement because Modi ji did not have the courage to come to the House that day so the Speaker is giving clarification on his behalf. This is wrong," she told reporters. "We are being targeted simply because we have consistently fought against Prime Minister Narender Modi's anti-people government and demanded accountability from him. His absence from the House was not due to any threat from us, it was an act of fear," said the letter.

In the letter, the women MPs said they are writing to Birla with deep anguish and a strong sense of constitutional responsibility. —*PTI*

MPs who were suspended from the Lok Sabha on 3 February for the remainder of the Budget session for 'unruly behaviour', stage a protest at Parliament premises, in New Delhi, on Monday —*PTI*

Tharoor slams govt over blocking RaGa's speaking in LS

Congress leader Shashi Tharoor said on Monday that the Leader of the Opposition, Rahul Gandhi, must be allowed to speak in the Lok Sabha and described as "absolutely bizarre" the "denial of the right to speak to one side" in the House. Tharoor said he allowed Gandhi to speak before his speech, but both his and the LoP's microphones were cut off. "Now we have had two presiding officers who refused to let the LoP speak, whereas the Minister for Parliamentary Affairs is always allowed," he said. Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra said that it is not a democracy if the LoP is not allowed to speak. Meanwhile, BJP leader Smriti Zubin Irani said Rahul has not read what government said in Budget. —*PTI*

Congress leader Shashi Tharoor fractured his leg after a fall from Parliament stairs — *PTI*

Tech must not enslave you: Modi tells students

NEW DELHI, 9 FEB

Prime Minister Narendra Modi advised students on Monday not to let technology enslave them, saying that artificial intelligence (AI) should be used for guidance and value addition, not as a substitute for learning. In the second episode of the ninth edition of the prime minister's annual 'Pariksha Pe Charcha' event, he noted that mobile phones have become masters of some children, who cannot even eat without them. "Every era has faced concerns with new technologies, whether computers or mobile phones. But the fear is unnecessary. Technology must not become the master of human life. You have to make a firm resolve that you will not let technology enslave you," Modi said told students from Coimbatore, Raipur, Guwahati and Gujarat. —*PTI*

— *PTI*

Sharad Pawar hospitalised with chest infection

PUNE, 9 FEB

Sharad Pawar, leader of the NCP (Sharad Pawar faction), was admitted to a private hospital in Pune from his Baramati residence after complaints of cough and breathing difficulties. A CT scan confirmed a chest infection, said Dr Parvez Grant, chief cardiologist at Ruby Hall Clinic. He mentioned Pawar might stay for a day for observation. The 85-year-old arrived in the afternoon, accompanied by daughter Supriya Sule and her husband Sadanand Sule. Pawar, who previously survived oral cancer, was suffering from throat infection, cough, and chest congestion. He arrived by MPV, came out on his own, and was later taken inside in a wheelchair. Party sources said he was also dealing with throat issues. —*PTI*

Bihar courts get bomb threat, MP's bail delayed

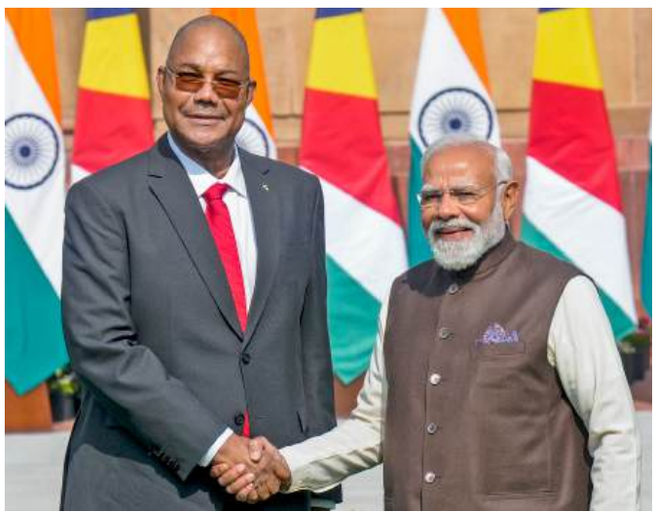
PATNA, 9 FEB

Two Bihar courts received bomb threats via email, leading to searches and suspension of judicial work. Patna Civil Court and Bhagalpur Civil Court conducted thorough searches after the threats, but found nothing suspicious. The Patna court received a mail claiming explosives were planted, which officials said was a hoax. The threat delayed the bail hearing of MP Pappu Yadav, arrested for forgery. His lawyer stated the bail application would be heard only the next day. Yadav's supporters, including Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, claimed the government was targeting him for criticising the investigation into a NEET aspirant's death. The email threats in Bihar are reportedly hoaxes. —*PTI*

Chaitanya Baghel's liquor scam plea hearing next week

NEW DELHI, 9 FEB

The Supreme Court announced it will hear in a week the Chhattisgarh government's appeal against bail granted to Chaitanya Baghel, son of ex-CM Bhupesh Baghel, in liquor scam cases. Senior advocate Mahesh Jethmalani said a key witness was not cooperating after Baghel's bail. The Enforcement Directorate challenged his bail in a money laundering case. The court also told Saumya Chaurasia, Baghel's deputy secretary, to approach the Chhattisgarh High Court for bail, within a week's time. Chaurasia was re-arrested in a related case. The high court had previously granted bail to Baghel, citing a lesser role and procedural reasons, amid allegations of a scam causing Rs 3,500 crore loss. —*PTI*



Seychelles President Patrick Herminie with PM Narendra Modi prior to their meeting at the Hyderabad House, in New Delhi, on Monday —*PTI*

India gives $175M aid to Seychelles

NEW DELHI, 9 FEB

India on Monday announced USD 175 million as development assistance to Seychelles after Prime Minister Narendra Modi held wide-ranging talks with the island nation's President Patrick Herminie who is on a six-days visit to India.

The two sides also agreed on a broad vision to expand cooperation in areas of sustainability, trade and economy and security. Seychelles is a key maritime neighbour for India in the Indian Ocean Region.

"India and Seychelles are connected not just by geography, but by history, trust and a shared vision for the future," Modi said in a statement to media. The PM said the development partnership has been the strong foundation of India-Seychelles relations.

"All our efforts have been based on Seychelles' priorities and needs. Moving forward in this direction, today we are going to announce a special economic package of USD 175 million," he said.

Modi said this package will support "concrete projects" in areas such as social housing, mobility, vocational training, health, defence, and maritime security.

"The greatest strength of India-Seychelles relations is our people-to-people ties. The Indian community settled in Seychelles has made a remarkable contribution to the social and economic life of Seychelles," he said. —*PTI*

Mahayuti wins ZP polls; NCP bags Pune

MUMBAI, 9 FEB

The BJP-led Mahayuti on Monday won the maximum share of the seats in the zilla parishad and gram panchayats retaining the numero uno position in the rural region of Maharashtra on Monday.

However, the focus of the elections were in Pune, where late Ajit Pawar's NCP swept the polls. The victory turned out to be an apt tribute to the former state deputy chief minister and party, which made the leaders and workers very emotional.

In Pune, the NCP and Sharad Pawar-led NCP (SP) contested together under the clock symbol.

The day also marked the 13th day rituals of Ajit, who had died in a plane crash on 28 January in his hometown of Baramati.

Party leaders and workers also met his wife and deputy chief minister Sunetra Pawar soon after the results of the local civic body polls were announced.

On the other hand, the good performance of the Shiv Sena in the coastal Ratnagiri district turned out to be a birthday gift for Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, who turned 62 on Monday.

Across Maharashtra, 12 zilla parishads, involving 731 members, and 125 panchayat samities, which have 1,462 members, had gone to polls on 5 February.

According to the latest available information from 714 seats, the BJP has won 225 seats, Ajit 's NCP 172, Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena 162, Congress 55, Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena (UBT) 46, Sharad-led NCP 21 and others won 33 seats. —*PTI*

Across Maharashtra, 12 zilla parishads, involving 731 members, and 125 panchayat samities, had gone to polls on 5 February —*PTI*

BJP's Manjusha Nagpure elected as Pune Mayor

PUNE, 9 FEB

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) corporator **Manjusha Nagpure** was elected unopposed as the mayor of the Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) on Monday. Parshuram Wadekar, a leader of the Republican Party of India (A), was elected unopposed as the deputy mayor. The unopposed elections were made possible after NCP's Shital Sawant and Congress leader Ashwini Landge withdrew from the mayoral contest. Nagpure, a corporator from the Sinhagad area, has been closely associated with the RSS. —*PTI*

Maoism never benefited society: Shah

JAGDALPUR, 9 FEB

Union Home Minister **Amit Shah** on Monday said Maoism never benefitted any society and spread destruction wherever it existed, citing examples of nations like Colombia, Peru and Cambodia.

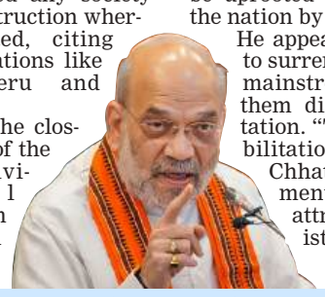
Speaking at the closing ceremony of the three-day divisional-level 'Bastar Pandum 2026' cultural event at Jagdalpur, the headquarters of Chhattisgarh's Bastar district, Shah reiterated that the Naxal menace will be uprooted completely from the nation by March 31.

He appealed to Naxalites to surrender and join the mainstream, promising them dignified rehabilitation. "The Maoist rehabilitation policy of the Chhattisgarh government is the most attractive," the minister asserted.

He also expressed concern over the remaining Naxals still holding out included young tribal girls.

"They must be sent for rehabilitation as their whole lives lie ahead of them," Shah said.

Assuring that surrendered Naxals would not face any harm, Shah warned that those who continue to fire bullets, plant IEDs (Improvised Explosive Devices) and torch schools and hospitals will not be spared. —*PTI*



WB elderly's death: TMC leader suspended

KOLKATA, 9 FEB

The ruling TMC in West Bengal has suspended Rabindra Nath Bhattacharya, a councillor of North Barrackpore Municipality, for six years after he was arrested for allegedly assaulting an 80-year-old man, leading to his death.

TMC MP Partha Bhowmick said the party has taken a "zero-tolerance" stance on the issue, and suspended the councillor with immediate effect.

The deceased, Tulsi Adhikari, was allegedly thrashed by Bhattacharya for protesting against an illegal construction in front of his house in Ward Number 23. Adhikari collapsed on the spot and was declared brought-dead at Jagadish Chandra Bose Hospital in Barrackpore Cantonment, police said.

The BJP on Monday staged a protest in Barrackpore in North 24 Parganas district, demanding capital punishment for the TMC councillor.

Additionally, a sub-divisional court remanded TMC leader to seven days' custody. —*PTI*

Himanta says Gogoi went to Rawalpindi without visa permit

GUWAHATI, 9 FEB

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Monday questioned Congress State President Gaurav Gogoi's visit to Rawalpindi in Pakistan, claiming that his visa permitted travel only to Lahore, Karachi, and Islamabad.

Hitting back after Gaurav Gogoi's press conference on Monday, the Chief Minister, adding to his "Pakistani agent" allegations, asked who facilitated his movement to Takshashila despite the alleged absence of visa clearance. However, Gogoi said that Takshashila (Taxila) is a tourist site, and he visited it as a "proud Indian."

"So the question is simple, factual, and legitimate: Who facilitated his movement to Takshashila despite the apparent absence of visa clearance for Rawalpindi District? This question gains further significance given that Pakistan Army's General Headquarters, the nerve centre of the Pakistani military, is also located in Rawalpindi," Himanta said.

Refuting the allegations levelled against him at a press conference, Gaurav Gogoi said that the SIT could not produce any evidence. —*PTI*

Assam Pradesh Congress Committee president Gaurav Gogoi addresses a press conference, in Guwahati, on Monday — *PTI*

'SAMI'S DAD FOUGHT FOR PAK IN 1965'

Bhagwat flayed over meal with Adnan Sami

MUMBAI, 9 FEB

The Opposition Congress and Shiv Sena (UBT) on Monday targeted the RSS over its chief Mohan Bhagwat having a meal with singer-composer Adnan Sami, with the grand old party alleging that it amounted to being "anti-national".

In a post on X, the Congress said that Adnan Sami's father had served as a pilot in the Pakistan Air Force and was involved in the 1965 India-Pakistan war, including the attack on the Pathankot air base.

The singer and several other celebrities, including Bollywood stars Salman Khan, Vicky Kaushal, Raveena Tandon and Shilpa Shetty, attended a two-day event in Mumbai over the weekend to mark the centenary of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS).

"Adnan Sami's father, Arshad Sami Khan, was a pilot in the Pakistan Air Force who destroyed the Pathankot air base during the 1965 war. Today, Mohan Bhagwat is enjoying a meal with him. RSS = anti-national," the Congress said in a post on X. —*PTI*

RSS Chief Mohan Bhagwat with singer-composer Adnan Sami at a restaurant —*X/@ADNANSAMILIVE*

Owaisi slams BJP-RSS Bharat Ratna demand

AIMIM Chief Asaduddin Owaisi launched a sharp attack on Monday against the BJP-RSS over the Sangh Chief's demand to confer a Bharat Ratna on VD Savarkar. Invoking Maulvi Allauddin, known for his contribution to the 1857 revolt, Owaisi criticised the idea of conferring highest civilian award on Savarkar. "There will be a time when BJP will confer Bharat Ratna on Nathuram Godse," he said. —*PTI*

DMK MP files privilege notice against Goyal

NEW DELHI, 9 FEB

- Siva raised the issue shortly after the Rajya Sabha met at 11am and papers were tabled. LoP Mallikarjun Kharge supported his assertion.

DMK MP **Tiruchi Siva** on Monday announced he had submitted a breach of privilege notice against Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal for sharing details of an interim trade deal between India and the US during a media interview while Parliament was in session.

Siva raised the issue shortly after the Rajya Sabha met at 11am and papers were tabled.

"I have given a notice of breach of privilege against Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal. He has given an interview regarding the government's policy decision outside the House while Parliament was in session. It amounts to breach of privilege of this House," Siva said. Leader of Opposition Mallikarjun Kharge supported his assertion. Goyal, on Sunday, said US trade deal has safeguards to protect farmers and domestic industry from increased imports, and will "ultimately help our farmers". —*PTI*

-PTI

Meghalaya orders probe into coal mine blast

SHILLONG, 9 FEB

Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma on Monday ordered a judicial inquiry into a blast at an illegal coal mine in East Jaintia Hills district that killed 27 people. The explosion occurred last week at a mine in the Thangsku area of Mynsngat village. Announcing the decision in a post on social media platform X, Sangma said an Inquiry Commission would be constituted under the Commission of Inquiry Act to investigate the incident. The blast triggered a search and rescue operation involving the SDRF, police, district administration and volunteers. A Home Department officer said the probe would examine circumstances, fix responsibility and suggest safeguards. —*PTI*

TN cop transferred for abusing migrant worker

ERODE, 9 FEB

A Tamil Nadu policeman was transferred to the Armed Reserve after a video purportedly showing him verbally abusing a migrant worker at a roadside eatery went viral, authorities said on Monday. Police said the incident occurred on the night of 8 February in the Kanchikoil area. The footage shows the policeman slapping the worker and questioning him about his native place, using expletives and then ordering the eatery to shut, citing late hours. He is also seen pushing cooking vessels with his baton. The worker protested, saying he was only an employee and showed the CCTV camera recording the incident. Police said an inquiry has been ordered. —*PTI*

-ANI

Indore varsity may fine colleges lacking greenery

INDORE, 9 FEB

The Devi Ahilya University in Indore is considering imposing fines on affiliated colleges that fail to maintain adequate greenery on their campuses, an official said on Monday. The move aligns with the MP government's push for environmental conservation and its repeated directives on tree plantation. Sachin Sharma, director of the university's College Development Council, said the varsity wants stricter adherence to these norms. The proposal will be placed before the executive council for approval. Around 200 colleges in MP are affiliated with the university. —*PTI*

-SCREENGRAB

70 Bihar children fall ill after mid-day meal

MADHEPURA, 9 FEB

Around 70 children fell ill after consuming mid-day meal at a government school in Bihar's Madhepura district, officials said on Monday. The incident occurred on Saturday at the Upgraded Middle School in Karu Tola, Madhepura Sadar block. Shortly after eating, students complained of vomiting, stomach pain and dizziness. Locals alleged a lizard had fallen into the food. The children were taken to Madhepura Sadar Hospital. Most kids are now out of danger. An inquiry has been ordered, the DEO said. —*PTI*

Punjab law student kills classmate, shoots himself

Both were first year law students, shooter serious

CHANDIGARH, 9 FEB

A law student in Punjab's Tarn Taran district on Monday allegedly shot dead a lady student in the head inside the classroom as horrified classmates watched on. He then turned the gun on himself and pulled the trigger.

While Prince Raj, the alleged killer was critically injured, Sandeep Kaur died on the spot, police said. Raj is now in hospital.

Both the attacker, Prince Raj, and the victim, Sandeep Kaur, were first-year law students and classmates. They were about 19-20 years old.

Deputy Superintendent of Police Jagbir Singh said Prince opened fire on Sandeep inside the classroom, leading to her death, and thereafter, he shot himself too.

Police said an investigation is underway to find the motive behind the killing that took place at the college located in Usma village.

Classes had not begun when the incident took place, said the police official.

While Sandeep Kaur died on the spot, Raj was taken to a hospital in critical condition, the police officer said.

Footage from a CCTV installed on the college premises showed Prince, Sandeep and another female student together in the classroom. Some other students could also be seen present in the classroom.

Suddenly, Prince got up from his desk and shot Sandeep. He then shot himself in the head and fell on the floor.

The shocked female student, who was sitting with Sandeep, got up and checked Kaur, who was motionless.

A few students could be seen entering the classroom after hearing the sound of the shots, but ran away after seeing Sandeep. Sandeep's mother Harjinder Kaur said she got a call from the college authorities, asking her to come to the college immediately.

Harjinder Kaur said that when she reached the college, she found her daughter motionless. She asked how a student could enter the college with a weapon. — *PTI*

A view of the classroom where the shooting occurred. The student who was shot died on the spot within a few minutes — *X/@SHUJAUH*

FIGHT INSIDE PRISON

Jailed terror suspect stabbed to death in Faridabad

FARIDABAD, 9 FEB

Terror accused Abdul Rehman, who was lodged in Neemla Jail, was murdered after a fight inside the prison, police said on Monday.

Police said the murder was allegedly committed by another prisoner, Arun Chaudhary, who was recently transferred to the facility from Jammu and Kashmir. The incident occurred on Sunday night when a quarrel broke out between the two inmates.

During the altercation, Chaudhary, a resident of J Kashmir, stabbed Rahman and he died on the spot.

A senior police officer said that a probe is underway to determine the exact sequence of events leading to the clash.

Rehman, a resident of Milkipur in UP's Faizabad district, had been in custody since June 2025 . He was apprehended from Pali village near Faridabad by a joint team of the Gujarat Anti-Terrorism Squad and a Special Task Force (STF) of the Haryana Police. An FIR against Rehman was filed at Dabua Police Station in Faridabad.

Officials said Rehman was involved in a conspiracy to carry out an explosion in Ayodhya. He was suspected of having links with the ISI, an STF official had said on condition of anonymity.

Two phones were seized from Rehman. In the mobiles, some incriminating videos were also found, sources had said, adding that they also found he had shared videos with a terror outfit.

The Haryana STF had received information that a sleeper cell could be supporting Rehman as they provided hand grenades to him. — *PTI*

- Police said the murder was allegedly committed by another prisoner, Arun Chaudhary, during an altercation. Arun was recently transferred to the facility from J&K

Tobacco baron's son rams his Lamborghini into pedestrians

KANPUR, 9 FEB

An FIR has been registered against an "unidentified person" after a Lamborghini allegedly driven by a tobacco baron's son ploughed into pedestrians here, injuring at least six, police said on Monday.

Police said the name of Shivam Mishra, the son of Banshidhar Exports Pvt Ltd's owner K K Mishra, is not in the FIR, but he is being investigated.

Recalling the horror, which unfolded on VIP Road in the upscale Gwaltoli area on Sunday, eyewitnesses said the car first hit an autorickshaw and then crashed into a stationary motorcycle, flinging its rider nearly 10 feet into the air.

The car mounted the motorcycle's front wheel and dragged it for some distance, hit an electric pole and came to a halt.

An FIR was registered against an unidentified person late on Sunday night, DCP (Central) Atul Kumar Srivastava said.

No one has been detained in connection with the incident, the DCP said and added that a probe is underway.

Gwaltoli police said, footage from CCTV cameras installed at nearby shops, traffic intersections and residential buildings is being examined to determine the speed of the vehicle.

The accused driver has been identified as Shivam Mishra. He is under close surveillance to prevent any attempt to escape.

Statements of the injured victims and eyewitnesses are being recorded, while the black Lamborghini has been seized and sent for inspection, police said. — *PTI*

Police personnel inspect the Lamborghini parked at a police station in Kanpur after it allegedly hit and injured six pedestrians —*PTI*

SC refuses to cancel doc's bail

NEW DELHI, 9 FEB

The Supreme Court on Monday declined to cancel bail granted to a Gujarat-based cardiologist, Dr Prashant Vazirani, who was arrested for conducting unnecessary, botched angioplasty operations on two PMJAY beneficiaries, resulting in their deaths.

A bench of Justices JK Maheshwari and AS Chandurkar dismissed a plea from the Gujarat government challenging the high court's 8 December decision to grant Vazirani regular bail. The bench stated, "He is a cardiologist, let him practice. If he's doing something illegal, you can take action."

The Gujarat government argued the case was serious, with two deaths attributed to the doctor's actions. The court responded, "We have seen all the material. We will not interfere."

Senior advocate Ranjit Kumar, representing Vazirani, was asked, "Why was he doing all this? Do not engage in such things."

Vazirani was arrested after FIRs were registered on 14 November 2024, by the Vastrapur police. The FIRs allege conspiracy for gain under the PMJAY scheme, with victims Nagarbhai Senma and Mahesh Barot dying after unnecessary angioplasty at Ahmedabad's Khyati Multispeciality Hospital. — *PTI*

SC quashes HP HC stay

The Supreme Court on Monday overturned the Himachal Pradesh High Court's interim order that had stayed the government's decision to relocate the OBC commission from Shimla to Dharamshala. A bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and N V Anjaria stated such policy decisions are generally not within the judiciary's ambit, adding, "Such issues are policy decisions and do not come under the judicial domain." —*PTI*

Meta plea hearing put off

The Supreme Court has deferred hearing on the pleas of Meta Platforms and WhatsApp against a Competition Commission of India (CCI) order imposing a Rs 213.14 crore fine until 23 February. Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and NV Anjaria were informed that senior advocate Kapil Sibal was unwell. The court stated it would consider interim relief on 23 February and allowed a party represented by Arvind Datar to join the case. —*PTI*

'Gunda Raj' unacceptable, CJI tells attacked lawyer

NEW DELHI, 9 FEB

Chief Justice of India Surya Kant on Monday observed that "Gunda Raj" is unacceptable and asked a lawyer, who alleged physical assault inside a courtroom at a district court on 7 February here, to approach the Delhi High Court. A lawyer mentioned his plea for urgent listing before a bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and N V Anjaria.

"I was appearing before the Tis Hazari court in a court of ADJ (Additional District Judge) Harjit Singh Pal. The complainant's advocate, and some goons attacked me. The judge was sitting right there," the lawyer said.

"This happened on 7 February. Have you informed the Delhi Chief Justice? Write a letter to the Chief Justice and mark that to me as well. This 'Gunda Raj' is not acceptable.Do this and tell me," the CJI said.

The bench asked the lawyer to move the jurisdictional High Court. — PTI

15 Delhi schools get bomb threats

NEW DELHI, 9 FEB

Around a dozen schools across New Delhi received bomb threat emails on Monday, prompting heavy police deployment and evacuations. Of these, eight were later declared hoaxes, officials said.

The threatening email carried disturbing and provocative content like, "Delhi will become Khalistan. Punjab is Khalistan. In memory of Afzal Guru." The email also alleged that a blast would take place inside Parliament on 13 February at 1.11 pm, prompting security alerts.

The Delhi Fire Services (DFS) said emergency calls were received from educational institutions in the morning, and fire tenders and bomb disposal squads were rushed.

As a precautionary measure, the schools were evacuated, and students and staff were moved to safe locations. Bomb detection and disposal squads, along with dog units, are conducting search operations at the affected schools. Senior officers said cyber teams have been pressed into service to trace the email. —*PTI*

Students stand outside New Delhi's DTA Tamil School on Monday after getting a bomb threat via email saying 'Delhi will become Khalistan' — *PTI*

HC grants bail to Baba Siddique murder accused

MUMBAI, 9 FEB

The Bombay High Court on Monday granted bail to Akashdeep Karaj Singh, an accused in the murder of Congress leader Baba Siddique, making him the first person to get relief in the case.

A bench of Justice Neela Gokhale directed Singh, a resident of Punjab, not to leave Mumbai until the trial is over in the case. Siddique, 66, was shot dead by three assailants outside his son Zeeshan's office in the Bandra East area on the night of 12 October 2024.

Singh, 22, who was arrested in November 2024, is the first accused to have secured bail in the case. The accused, in his bail plea, claimed he was implicated in the case and that the allegations levelled against him were baseless and vague.

Singh claimed that he is only accused of being a member of an organised crime syndicate, and no specific role has been attributed to him in the present case. He also contended that the trial would not start in the near future, and said incarceration without trial violated his fundamental rights. In January 2026, the police filed a chargesheet in the case, showing Anmol Bishnoi, brother of jailed gangster Lawrence Bishnoi, as a wanted accused.

The prosecution said Anmol had hatched a conspiracy to kill Siddique to frighten the crime syndicate. —*PTI*

MISSION 2 YEARS AWAY

ISRO identifies site for Chandrayaan-4 lander

BENGALURU, 9 FEB

The Chandrayaan-4 Mission is at least two years away, but the ISRO has identified a location in the South Polar region of the Moon to land its lander.

The Centre has approved the Chandrayaan-4 mission, designed as a lunar sample-return mission and it will be India's most complex lunar endeavour yet. "We are targeting 2028 for Chandrayaan-4," ISRO Chairman V Narayanan had earlier said.

ISRO officials said they had zeroed in on four sites of the Mons Mouton (MM) and found one of them suitable for landing on the lunar surface. Mons Mouton is a region on the Moon. Officials said they had identified locations, MM-1, MM-3, MM-4 and MM-5. Of them, MM-4 was chosen for the landing.

"The four sites in Mons Mouton area were fully checked using high resolution Orbiter High Resolution Camera (OHRC) image datasets," they said.

It was found that a kilometre by one kilometre area around MM-4 contains "the less hazard percentage, mean slope of 5 degrees, mean height of 5334 metres and most number of hazard free grids of size 24 metres into 24 metres. Hence, MM-4 could be considered as the potential site of Chandrayaan-4 mission," officials said. Chandrayaan-4 consists of a Propulsion Module (PM), a Descender module (DM), an Ascender Module (AM), a Transfer Module (TM) and a Re-entry Module (RM).

The DM and AM stack will soft land on the moon. The main landing will be done by an appropriate stack (AM+DM) descent trajectory with guidance and control system while the safe landing can be ensured by a proper selection of the landing site that meets all the constraints of the Lander. — PTI

The Centre has approved the Chandrayaan-4 mission, designed as a lunar sample-return mission -*ISRO*

UNREST IN VARANASI

Protest arose on Monday in Uttar Pradesh's Varanasi as authorities began demolition work for a road widening project in the Dal Mandi area. A shopkeeper allegedly set his shop on fire to protest against the demolition and later fled the scene. Several others who were involved in the protest were detained by police for creating chaos. Authorities evacuated the area to avoid casualties —*PTI*

Europe shaken by Epstein files; US fallout muted

A prince, an ambassador, senior diplomats, top politicians. All brought down by the Jeffrey Epstein files. And all in Europe, rather than the US.

The huge trove of Epstein documents released by the US Department of Justice has sent shock waves through Europe's political, economic and social elites — dominating headlines, ending careers and spurring political and criminal investigations.

Former UK ambassador to Washington Peter Mandelson was fired and could go to prison. British Prime Minister Keir Starmer faces a leadership crisis over the Mandelson appointment. Senior figures have fallen in Norway, Sweden and Slovakia. And, even before the latest batch of files, Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor, brother of King Charles III, lost his honours, princely title and taxpayer-funded mansion.

Apart from the former prince Andrew, none of them faces claims of sexual wrongdoing. They have been toppled for maintaining friendly relationships with Epstein after he became a convicted sex offender.

"Epstein collected powerful people the way others collect frequent flyer points," said Mark Stephens, a specialist in international and human rights law at Howard Kennedy in London. "But the receipts are now in public, and some might wish they'd travelled less."

The documents were published after a public frenzy over Epstein became a crisis for President Donald Trump's administration and led to a rare bipartisan effort to force the government to open its investigative files. But in the US, the long-sought publication has not brought the same public reckoning with Epstein's associates — at least so far.

Former UK ambassador to Washington Peter Mandelson with British Prime Minister Keir Starmer —*PTI*

BRITISH REPERCUSSIONS

UK figures felled by their ties to Epstein include the former Prince Andrew — who paid millions to settle a lawsuit with one of Epstein's victims and is facing pressure to testify in the US — and his ex-wife Sarah Ferguson, whose charity shut down this week.

Like others now ensnared, veteran politician Mandelson long downplayed his relationship with Epstein, despite calling him "my pest pal" in 2003.

The new files reveal contact continued for years after the financier's 2008 prison term for sexual offences involving a minor. In a July 2009 message, Mandelson appeared to refer to Epstein's release from prison as "liberation day."

Starmer fired Mandelson in September over earlier revelations about his Epstein ties.

AMERICAN ASSOCIATES

Experts caution that Britain shouldn't be too quick to pat itself on the back over its rapid reckoning with Mandelson. The US has a better record than the UK when it comes to declassifying and publishing information.

But Alex Thomas, executive director of the Institute for Government think tank, said "there is something about parliamentary democracy," with its need for a prime minister to retain the confidence of Parliament to stay in office, "that I think does help drive accountability."

Brad Karp quit last week as chair of top US law firm Paul Weiss after revelations in the latest batch of documents, and the National Football League said it would investigate Epstein's relationship with New York Giants co-owner Steve Tisch, who exchanged sometimes crude emails with Epstein about potential dates with adult women.

Former President Bill Clinton has been compelled by Republicans to testify before Congress about his friendship with Epstein. Trump, too, has repeatedly faced questions about his ties to Epstein. Neither he nor Clinton has ever been accused of wrongdoing by Epstein's victims.

EUROPEAN INVESTIGATIONS

The Epstein files reveal the global network of royals, political leaders, billionaires, bankers and academics that the wealthy financier built around him.

Across Europe, officials have resigned or face censure after the Epstein files revealed relationships that were more extensive than previously disclosed.

Joanna Rubinstein, a Swedish UN official, quit after the revelation of a 2012 visit to Epstein's Caribbean island. Miroslav Lajcak, national security adviser to Slovakia's prime minister, quit over his communications with Epstein, which included the pair discussing "gorgeous" girls.

Poland's Prime Minister Donald Tusk said a team would scour the files for potential Polish vic- tims, and any links between Epstein and Russian secret services.

NORWEGIAN REVELATIONS

Few countries have been as roiled by the Epstein revelations as Norway, a Scandinavian nation with a population of less than 6 million.

The country's economic crimes unit has opened a corruption investigation into former Prime Minister Thorbjørn Jagland — who also once headed the committee that hands out the Nobel Peace Prize — over his ties with Epstein.

Also ensnared are high-profile Norwegian diplomat couple Terje Rød-Larsen and Mona Juul, key players in the 1990s Israel-Palestinian peace efforts.

Juul has been suspended as Norway's ambassador to Jordan after revelations including the fact that Epstein left the couple's children USD 10 million in a will drawn up shortly before his death by suicide in a New York prison in 2019.

Norwegians' respect for their royal family has been dented by new details about Epstein's friendship with Crown Princess Mette-Marit, who is married to heir to the throne, Prince Haakon. —*PTI*

SALAR سالار

Japan's PM expands her power after election win

Japan's Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi is a heavy metal music fan. She loves motorcycles and playing the drums, including with visiting dignitaries.

She thrilled a nation that often fetishises company loyalty by declaring that her secret for success as leader would be "work, work, work, work, work."

This charismatic combination, along with an image that is both tough and playful, has made Takaichi very popular, something exceedingly unusual for recent prime ministers her political party, which has led Japan for most of the last seven decades, has struggled mightily.

In stark contrast to the long line of often elderly men who've run Japan over the decades, Takaichi's popularity is rooted in her support by younger people. They affectionately use her nickname, "Sana," and closely follow her fashion, her choice of stationery and her favourite food — steamed pork buns.

Her Liberal Democratic Party, despite deep-rooted problems, made big gains in Sunday's vote in the lower house of Parliament, thanks in large part to Takaichi.

She wants to use this new power to take the country in the direction of her hawkish, deeply conservative mentor, the late Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, and beyond.

The Associated Press takes a look at the first woman to lead Japan as PM.

SHE WORKED HER WAY UP FROM THE MIDDLE CLASS

Born in Nara, Japan's ancient capital, Takaichi was raised by conservative parents who taught her pre-war moral values.

Her mother was a police officer and her father worked at a machinery maker.

As a child, she enjoyed listening to her parents recite an 1890 imperial document that praises paternalistic family values and loyalty to the government, Takaichi said in 2012.

Though she was admitted to prestigious Tokyo schools, her parents made her attend Kobe University while living at home, something that was normal then for unmarried daughters of conservative families.

She was briefly an intern for a US Democratic lawmaker in Denver in the late 1980s and, after returning to Japan, worked as a television personality, an author and a critic.

Takaichi is unique because she both speaks her mind and is seen as easygoing, said Izuru Makihara, a University of Tokyo politics expert.

She was elected PM by Parliament in October.

STRUGGLED IN MALE-DOMINATED POLITICS, BUT IS NOT A FEMINIST

She was first elected to Parliament in 1993 after defying her parents' opposition.

Some voters insulted her as "a little girl," she said in 2023, recalling that first campaign as a 32-year-old.

"I am who I am," Takaichi said. "The only way to prove myself is with the work I do."

She supports the imperial family's male-only succession and opposes same-sex marriage as well as amending the 19th-century law requiring married couples to have the same surname, under which most women are pressured into abandoning theirs.

Feminists are not happy and say Takaichi's leadership is a setback for Japanese gender equality.

FOLLOWING ABE'S POLICIES WHILE PUSHING FURTHER

As Abe's protege, Takaichi has echoed his nationalistic views, defending Japanese wartime actions, pushing for greater military capability and spending, as well as more patriotic education, and the promotion of traditional family values.

After Abe stepped down and backed her as "the star of the conservatives," Takaichi ran for the LDP leadership race twice, in 2021 and 2024, both unsuccessfully, before finally winning the top job in October, replacing Abe's rival — centrist Shigeru Ishiba.

WORKAHOLIC WHO'D RATHER BE IN OFFICE THAN SOCIALISING

Takaichi has admitted she doesn't like drinking parties and would much rather study at home, though she tried to socialise more to build connections with colleagues after her two unsuccessful leadership bids.

After being elected as LDP leader, Takaichi asked her party members to "work like a horse" and said she would forget her "work-life balance" and "work, work, work, work and work." These phrases became buzzwords, but some found them uncomfortable in a country known for long hours and overwork.

Analysing her daily schedule during her first three months in office, the Kyodo News Agency reported last month that she was largely "holed up" in the official residence or her office.

STRICT BUT LIGHTHEARTED

Her strictness can be linked to her mother.

One time when Takaichi returned to Nara and complained about being tired because of her work, her mother slapped her in the face, she said, scolding her for griping about a path she'd chosen for herself. But there's also a playful side.

Years earlier, when Takaichi found out that they attended the same elementary school in Nara, she asked Nagai if he remembered the school song, and they sang it together. —*PTI*

Japan Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi is rooted in her support by younger people —*SCREENGRAB*

LETTERS

write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Ukraine businesses struggle as Russian attacks bring power crisis

- Operating generators to overcome power outages is just one of many challenges facing Ukrainian businesses after nearly four years of war. Acute labour shortages due to mobilisation and war-related migration, security risks, declining purchasing power and complicated logistics add to the pressure

It is pre-dawn in the historic Podil district of the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv, and warm light from the Spelta bakery-bistro's window pierces the darkness outside.

On a wooden surface dusted with flour, the baker Oleksandr Kutsenko skilfully divides and shapes soft, damp pieces of dough. As he shoves the first loaves into the oven, a sweet, delicate aroma of fresh bread fills the space.

Seconds later, the lights go out, the ovens switch off, and darkness envelops the room. Kutsenko, 31, steps outside into the freezing night, switches on a large rectangular generator, and the power kicks back in.

It's a pattern that will be repeated many times as the business struggles to keep working through the power outages caused by Russia's bombing campaign on Ukraine's energy grid.

"It's now more than impossible to imagine a Ukrainian business operating without a generator," said Olha Hrynchuk, the co-founder and head baker of Spelta.

The cost of purchasing and operating generators to overcome power outages is just one of many challenges facing Ukrainian businesses after nearly four years of war. Acute labour shortages due to mobilisation and war-related migration, security risks, declining purchasing power and complicated logistics add to the pressure, officials say.

Hrynchuk, 28, opened the bakery 10 months after Russia launched its full-scale invasion in 2022.

That winter was the first year Russia targeted Ukraine's energy system. Hrynchuk says they barely know what it is to work under "normal" conditions, but have never faced the challenges they do now.

Production is entirely dependent on electricity, and the generator burns about 700 hryvnias (USD 16) worth of fuel per hour.

"We run on a generator for 10 to 12 hours a day. You have no fixed schedule — you have to adapt and refuel it at the same time," Hrynchuk said.

OPERATE AT A LOSS'

Olha Nasonova, 52, who is head of the Restaurants of Ukraine analytical centre, says the industry is experiencing its most difficult period of the past 20 years.

While businesses were prepared for electricity cuts, no one expected such a cold winter, and it's been especially tough for small cafés and family-run establishments, because they have the least financial resources.

Production is entirely dependent on electricity, and the generator burns about 700 hryvnias ($16) worth of fuel per hour —*FREEPIK*

The "Best Way to Cup" project, which has two venues and roasts and grinds its own coffee, is on the brink of permanent closure. Co-founder Yana Bilym, 33, who opened the cafe in May, said a Russian attack shattered all its windows and glass doors in August. Bilym said the cost of renovation was 150,000 hryvnias (about USD 3,400), half of which she financed with a bank loan that she only recently finished repaying.

Last month, after several consecutive large-scale Russian attacks on the energy sector, her entire building lost its water supply, and soon after, the sewer system stopped working.

GENERATORS ARE EXPENSIVE TO RUN

Many businesses have become a lifeline for communities struggling with plunging temperatures. Ukraine's government has allowed some firms to operate during curfew hours in the energy emergency as "Points of Invincibility," allowing access to free electricity to charge phones and power banks, drink tea and have some respite from the cold.

Tetiana Abramova, 61, is a founder of the Rito Group, a clothing company that has been producing designer knitwear for men and women since 1991, the year Ukraine became independent.

It participates in Ukraine Fashion Week, the country's biggest fashion show, and exports garments to the United States. Abramova took out a loan in 2022 to purchase a powerful 35-kilowatt generator costing 500,000 hryvnias (USD 11,500) to keep the business running during blackouts and a wood-fired boiler for heating.But it's not easy.

Operating on generators is 15 per cent–20 per cent more expensive than using regular electricity. As a result, production costs are currently about 15 per cent higher than normal. Added to that, customer numbers have dropped by about 40 per cent as many people have left the country, so the focus is now on attracting new clients through online sales.

MAIN GOAL IS TO SURVIVE'

A macroeconomic forecast by the Kyiv School of Economics for the first quarter of 2026 says strikes on the energy system are currently the most acute short-term risk to the country's GDP. The analysis says that if the business manages to adapt, output losses could be limited to around 1 per cent or 2 per cent of GDP.

But if the energy system failures are prolonged, it could lead to larger losses of as much as 2 per cent or 3 per cent of GDP. Abramova, an entrepreneur with more than 30 years of experience, says she spent nearly 100,000 hryvnias (USD 2,300) over two months on generator servicing to maintain production. But she cannot pass all those costs on to retailers. —*PTI*

PHOTO: INSTAGRAM

Grammy winner Bad Bunny makes Super Bowl history

SANTA CLARA, 9 FEB

Global superstar Bad Bunny made history on Sunday as the first artist to headline a NFL Super Bowl Halftime Show performed almost entirely in Spanish. The 31-year-old icon, hailing from the US territory of Puerto Rico used the 14-minute show at Levi's Stadium in California to celebrate Pan-American unity, featuring a signature "casita" stage and guest appearances by Lady Gaga, Ricky Martin, Cardi B, and Pedro Pascal. While the high-energy set was a cultural milestone for the Americas, it drew sharp criticism from US President Donald Trump, who labelled the performance "absolutely terrible" on social media. Despite the political friction, the show solidified his status as a global icon following his reign as 2025's most-streamed artist —*AGENCIES*

Nicaragua blocks Cuban migrants' key route into US

MEXICO CITY, 9 FEB

Nicaragua has blocked Cuban citizens from entering without a visa, cutting off a vital route for migration to the US amid US pressure on Cuba. The government confirmed to The Associated Press that it suspended an exemption allowing Cubans into Nicaragua freely. Historically, Cubans used Nicaragua as a transit point, flying there before joining smugglers to travel through Central America and Mexico to reach the US border. Experts suggest Nicaragua's move aims to weaponise migration against the US, especially as the Trump administration increased sanctions and threatened tariffs on oil-exporting nations supporting Cuba. This change is likely to push migrants to alternative routes, such as Guyana, where they travel through dangerous terrains or take risky boats to Florida. —*PTI*

Venezuela LoP ally kidnapped hours after release

CARACAS, 9 FEB

Venezuelan de facto opposition leader (LoP) María Corina Machado said on Monday that her close ally, Juan Pablo Guanipa, was kidnapped in Caracas just hours after his release from an eight-month detention. Machado stated that Guanipa was abducted from his home on Sunday. The incident occurred as acting President Delcy Rodríguez—who took office after the capture of Nicolás Maduro by US military forces—faces pressure to release all political prisoners. The Public Prosecutor's Office later claimed Guanipa was re-detained for "violating release conditions." Rights groups have described the move as a "revolving door" tactic, overshadowing the government's deadline to release all political prisoners by 13 February. —*PTI*

NZ mosque shooter claims guilty plea was 'coerced'

WELLINGTON, 9 FEB

Brenton Tarrant, responsible for New Zealand's deadliest mass shooting, has told an Wellington appeals court he was coerced into pleading guilty due to "irrationality" caused by prison conditions. The Court of Appeal will hear five days of evidence on whether Tarrant was fit to plead to charges of terrorism, murder, and attempted murder after the 2019 Christchurch attack, which killed 51 worshippers. Tarrant claims his mental health deteriorated in solitary confinement, suffering "nervous exhaustion," and he was not fit to plead. If successful, his case would return for trial; otherwise, his plea would stand. The hearing, under tight security, marks his first public statement since livestreaming the massacre. —*PTI*

Starmer fights for his job amid Epstein files fallout

Chief of staff quits, triggers Labour revolt

LONDON, 9 FEB

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer's leadership is in crisis following his Chief of Staff Morgan McSweeney's resignation on Sunday, with Starmer scheduled to address Labour lawmakers behind closed doors later today as he scrambles to prevent being voted out.

McSweeney stepped down after taking "full responsibility" for advising the Prime Minister to appoint Peter Mandelson as UK Ambassador to the US in 2024. The resignation follows mounting pressure from newly released US "Epstein files," which detail Peter Mandelson's extensive links to the late sex offender.

Although Starmer dismissed Mandelson in September 2025, critics argue his initial decision to appoint the controversial figure to Britain's top diplomatic post—despite known risks—represents a fatal lapse in judgment. Starmer promised to release documentation related to Mandelson's appointment, which the government says will show that Mandelson misled officials about his ties to Epstein.

McSweeney, who has taken the blame for Mendelson's appointmnet, has been Starmer's most important

UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer—*PTI*

aide since he became Labour leader in 2020, and is considered a key architect of Labour's landslide July 2024 election victory.

Since winning office, Starmer has struggled to deliver promised economic growth, repair tattered public services and ease the cost of living. He pledged a return to honest government after 14 years of scandal-tarred Conservative rule, but has been beset by missteps and U-turns over welfare cuts and other unpopular policies.

Under Britain's parliamentary system, prime ministers can change without the need for a national election. If Starmer is challenged or resigns, it would trigger an election for the Labour leadership. The winner would become prime minister.

ROYAL FAMILY DISTANCES ITSELF FROM EPSTEIN LINK

Prince William and Princess Catherine on Monday voiced concern for the victims of Jeffrey Epstein, as the British monarchy took steps to distance itself from renewed scrutiny of Prince Andrew's past ties to the convicted sex offender.

Issued ahead of William's three-day trip to Saudi Arabia starting Monday, the statement forms part of the monarchy's response to the deepening crisis around Prince Andrew, who was stripped of his titles in October over his ties to Epstein. The king last week forced Mountbatten-Windsor to leave his longtime home at Royal Lodge near Windsor Castle, accelerating a move that was first announced in October but wasn't expected to be until later this year.

Mountbatten-Windsor has repeatedly denied any wrongdoing in his relationship with Epstein. . —*PTI*

Super Bowl ad: Survivors want all Epstein files out

Epstein survivors in an ad from during the Super Bowl —*SCREENGRAB*

WASHINGTON, 9 FEB

A group of Jefferey Epstein survivors appeared during a commercial during a 'Super Bowl' and urged the Department of Justice (DOJ) to release all files related to the late convicted sex trafficker.

Their emotional appeal, released by World Without Exploitation, was broadcast via a public service announcement (PSA) on Super Bowl on Sunday. The 'Super Bowl' is one of the US' most watched events of the year.

The eight women in the clip have smears of black marker pens over their mouth, in an apparent reference to the massive redactions in the files released publicly by the DOJ.

"We all deserve the truth," said the victims in the video.

They hold up photographs of when they were younger and allegedly sexually abused by influential figures.

"After years of being kept apart, we're standing together," they said.

The PSA closes with a request: "Stand With Us. Tell Attorney General Pam Bondi: IT IS TIME FOR THE TRUTH." —*AGENCIES*

Tell the truth, I'll pay: Musk tells victims

Tesla's chief and the world's richest man, Elon Musk, has offered to fund legal defences for Jeffrey Epstein's victims who fear being sued for naming their perpetrators. Musk's pledge followed a Super Bowl Sunday PSA where survivors urged US Attorney General Pam Bondi to support their quest for accountability. "I will pay for the defence of anyone who speaks the truth," Musk stated. -Agencies

Epstein's death statement drafted before he died

NEW YORK, 9 FEB

The recently released files on the investigations of convicted sex trafficker Jefferey Epstein show that the US government statement announcing his death was drafted a day before he was officially found dead.

Epstein was found hanging in his cell in a New York prison on 10 August, 2019 at the Metropolitan Correctional Centre in Manhattan. However, the US Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York has a document dated 9 August, 2019, states that Epstein had already been found unresponsive and pronounced dead.

The files contain multiple versions of similar draft statements with inconsistent redactions.

The official records state that a corrections officer discovered Epstein while delivering breakfast in the morning of 10 August.

This has furthered theories that the late financier did not die by suicide but was instead killed at least one of the many high-profile figures whom he had trafficked women and underaged girls for. This is compounded by missing security footage on the night of his alleged suicide and several procedural lapses from official.

Epstein, 66, had been in had been in federal custody since 6 July, 2019, for trafficking underage girls. —*AGENCIES*

Israel tightens grip on West Bank amid ceasefire tension

Israel's security cabinet on Sunday approved measures to deepen Israeli control over the West Bank, weakening Palestinian authority—*PTI*

JERUSALEM, 9 FEB

Israel's security cabinet on Sunday approved measures to deepen Israeli control over the occupied West Bank and weakening the Palestinian Authority's limited powers.

Far-right Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich said the steps would make it easier for Jewish settlers to acquire land, adding that Israel would "continue to bury the idea of a Palestinian state".

The measures include easing land sales to Israelis, declassifying land registry records, transferring planning powers in sensitive areas of Hebron to Israeli authorities, and allowing Israeli enforcement in Palestinian-administered zones. Peace Now researcher Yonatan Mizrachi called the decision "significant", while Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas termed it "dangerous" and urged US and UN intervention. Jordan also condemned the move.

ISRAELI ACTION IN SOUTHERN LEBANON

Separately, Israeli forces seized a local official of Sunni Islamist group al-Jamaa al-Islamiya during an operation in southern Lebanon and took him to Israel for questioning. Lebanese media also reported an Israeli drone strike in Yanouh village that killed three people, including a child. Israel said operations target militant threats amid ongoing post-ceasefire tensions. —*PTI*

Israel Prez visits Sydney's Bondi Beach, meets families

MELBOURNE, 9 FEB

Israeli President Isaac Herzog on Monday began a State visit to Australia by visiting Sydney's Bondi Beach, where an antisemitic attack in December killed 15 people.

Herzog laid a wreath and two stones brought from Jerusalem at Bondi Pavilion and met victims' families and survivors. "We were shaken to our core," he said. The stones would symbolise unity against "terror, violence and hatred".

The attack on 14 December during a Jewish festival left 40 injured. One alleged gunman survived and has been charged with terrorism-related offences. Herzog said the visit was an opportunity to strengthen ties between "two democracies that share values".

Tight security surrounded the visit, with protests planned later over Israel's war in Gaza. Herzog welcomed Australia's steps to counter antisemitism, including a royal commission and tougher anti hate-speech laws. —*PTI*

Nepal polls heat up as ex-mayor Balen challenges ex-PM Oli in Jhapa

KATHMANDU, 9 FEB

In the run-up to Nepal's 5 March general election, Jhapa constituency has become a focal point, with former Kathmandu mayor Balen taking on ousted prime minister KP Sharma Oli. Rapper-turned-politician Balen of the Rastriya Swotantra Party (RSP) has been campaigning in Jhapa-5, while CPN-UML leader Oli has already launched his campaign there.

Election between Oli and Balen—*FB*

Oli has historically won six out of seven parliamentary elections in Jhapa. In the previous election, he defeated a Nepali Congress candidate by a large margin. Senior rights activist Charan Prasai noted that Oli's campaign will face tougher competition this time.

Oli resigned on 9 September amid violent protests, leading to interim Prime Minister Sushila Karki's appointment and the House's dissolution. Balen has visited multiple locations in Jhapa-5, Oli's stronghold is aiming to challenge the legacy party. The main contest is between Oli and Balen. —*PTI*

US engineered dollar shortage in Iran: Bessent

WASHINGTON, 9 FEB

Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent told the Senate on Friday that the US created the shortage of currency in Iran.

The protests, which began last December and escalated into a deadly January crackdown that killed thousands, were triggered by the collapse of Iran's rial.

"What we have done is create a dollar shortage in the country," Bessent said.

"It came to a swift and, I would say, grand culmination in December, when one of the largest banks in Iran went under."

"The central bank had to print money. The Iranian currency went into free fall. And hence, we have seen Iranians on the street," Bessent said.

"We have seen the Iranian leadership wiring money out of the country" he said. "So the rats are leaving the ship.

US President Donald Trump Donald Trump had threatened to strike Iran during the crackdown on protestors, but has since changed tune and is focusing more on the nuclear proliferation. —*AGENCIES*

Portugal's António Seguro —*PTI*

Portugal Socialist wins presidency

LISBON, 9 FEB

Centre-left Socialist candidate António José Seguro recorded a victory over hard-right populist André Ventura in Portugal's runoff presidential election Sunday, according to 96 per cent of votes counted.

Seguro won a five-year term in Lisbon's riverside "pink palace" with 66 per cent of votes, compared with 34 per cent for Ventura.

The ballot was an opportunity to test the depth of support for Ventura's brash style, which has struck a chord with voters and helped make his Chega (Enough) party the second-biggest in the Portuguese parliament, as well as gauge the public appetite for Europe's increasing shift to the right in recent years.

Ventura said he will keep working to bring about a political "transformation" in Portugal. —*PTI*

Japan PM Takaichi moves swiftly to press for reforms

TOKYO, 9 FEB

Japan Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's gamble that her popularity would lead to election gains for her struggling party paid off.

Following Sunday's landslide victory, Prime Minister Takaichi began leveraging her two-thirds supermajority Monday to advance a conservative agenda, targeting significant reforms in Japan's security, immigration, and economic and social policies.

The first steps include reappointing her Cabinet and pushing forward on a delayed budget, and the votes next week that will re-elect her as prime minister.

Takaichi, in an interview with public television network NHK following her victory, said her efforts will make Japan strong and prosperous.

NHK, citing vote count results, said Takaichi's Liberal Democratic Party, or LDP, alone secured 316 seats by early Monday, comfortably surpassing a 261-seat absolute majority in the 465-member lower house, the more powerful of Japan's two-chamber parliament.

US President Donald Trump, congratulated Takaichi on Sunday on her victory. —*PTI*

THAI VICTOR TO HOLD COALITION TALKS

BANGKOK, 9 FEB

As Thailand's Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul's Bhumjaithai party on Monday registered a victory in the general election, the country is poised for a realignment of conservative politics with coalition talks scheduled.

With 94 per cent votes counted, the ruling Bhumjaithai party led decisively, winning 193 of the 500 seats.

Anutin said he wanted to form an administration with a strong majority even as he awaited the final result.

The result took stocks (SETI), opens new tab up 4 per cent in Southeast Asia's second-largest economy, to their highest level in over a year, signalling declining risks of political instability.

It's the first decisive victory of a conservative party in Thailand in years. Sunday's election came against a backdrop of slow economic growth and heightened nationalist sentiment. —*AGENCIES*

B'DESH BANS PHONES NEAR POLL BOOTHS, RIGHT PROTESTS

DHAKA, 9 FEB

Bangladesh's Election Commission is prohibiting mobile phones within 400 yards of polling centres on the election day, sparking protests from right-wing political parties.

Bangladesh will hold parliamentary elections on February 12 - the first since the ouster of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina following massive protests led by students in August 2024.

"No individual (including voters, polling agents and others) will be allowed to enter a polling centre or remain within a 400-yard radius of it with a mobile phone," said the EC directive issued on Sunday.

Jamaat-e-Islami chief **Shafiqur Rahman** said, "If this rule is not withdrawn by this (Monday) evening, a stern movement will be built."

The student-led National Citizen Party (NCP) convenor Nahid Islam warned, "If the decision is not withdrawn by this evening, the EC will be besieged tomorrow (Tuesday)." —*PTI*

CHINA'S NATIONAL SECURITY LAW

Hong Kong's media mogul gets 20 yrs in jail

Jimmy Lai, former media tycoon and outspoken critic of Beijing—*x*

HONG KONG, 9 FEB

Jimmy Lai, the pro-democracy former Hong Kong media tycoon and outspoken critic of Beijing, was on Monday sentenced to 20 years in prison, the harshest punishment under the China-imposed national security law that has silenced dissent in the city.

Lai, 78, was convicted in December of conspiring to collude with foreign forces and conspiracy to publish seditious articles, offences that carry a maximum penalty of life imprisonment. Six former Apple Daily employees and two activists were also jailed for terms ranging from six years and three months to 10 years.

- Jimmy Lai founded Apple Daily, which shut in 2021 after senior staff were arrested. The Hong Kong government insists the prosecution is totally unrelated to journalism.

Lai smiled and waved at supporters as he entered court but appeared solemn as the sentence was read out. His lawyer declined to comment on a possible appeal.

The case has heightened international concern over press freedom. Lai founded the now-defunct Apple Daily, which shut in 2021 after senior staff were arrested. The Hong Kong government insists the prosecution is unrelated to journalism.

US President Donald Trump and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer have called for Lai's release. His family described the sentence as "cruel", while Hong Kong leader John Lee said it upheld the rule of law. Judges cited his age and health while sentencing him. —*PTI*

Silver, gold futures rally amid global rebound

NEW DELHI, 9 FEB

Precious metals rallied in futures trade on Monday, tracking a rebound in global markets, a weaker US dollar and safe-haven demand. On the MCX, silver futures jumped 4.74 per cent, or Rs 11,853, to Rs 2,61,745 per kg, while gold April contracts rose 1.34 per cent, or Rs 2,089, to Rs 1,57,540 per 10 grams. Internationally, Comex silver surged 6.25 per cent to USD 81.70 per ounce, while gold gained 1.64 per cent to USD 5,061.49 per ounce. Senior analyst Jigar Trivedi said buying followed a historic selloff, aided by easing geopolitical tensions and continued gold purchases by China's central bank. He added that traders continued to buy the precious metals after a historic selloff that erased nearly half of silver's value. *—PTI*

MakeMyTrip, Minor Hotels tie up for international stays

NEW DELHI, 9 FEB

Online travel platform MakeMyTrip on Monday announced a strategic partnership with Minor Hotels to expand international stay options for Indian travellers. The tie-up adds city hotels and resorts across Europe, Asia and the Middle East. Minor Hotels operates over 560 properties worldwide under brands such as Anantara, NH Collection and Avani. About 60 Minor Hotels properties are live on the platform, with listings expected to scale. "Our partnership with Minor Hotels is part of our strategy to deepen engagement with hospitality groups," said Rajesh Magow, Co-founder and Group CEO, MakeMyTrip. Minor Hotels' Chief Commercial Officer Ian Di Tullio said India remains a growth market, with tailored experiences for Indian guests. Their hotels will strengthen their offerings across properties. *—PTI*

Zetwerk sees 2nd executive exit ahead of IPO

NEW DELHI, 9 FEB

Initial public offering-bound manufacturing unicorn Zetwerk has seen a second senior exit ahead of its planned public listing, with electronics business head Josh Foulger resigning, sources said. "Josh Foulger is no longer with Zetwerk," a source told PTI. Foulger, who earlier headed Foxconn's India arm Bharat FIH, exited within two years of joining. Last month, Chief Marketing Officer Amrit Raj resigned and joined venture capital firm Jungle Ventures. A Zetwerk spokesperson said Foulger "was instrumental in shaping Zetwerk Electronics" and is moving back to Chennai for personal reasons. Zetwerk has earmarked Rs 1,000 crore to expand electronics manufacturing. The company was last valued above USD 3.1 billion, while gross merchandise value scaled to more than USD 2 billion. *—PTI*

Zydus Lifesciences Q3 profit rose to Rs 1,042 crore

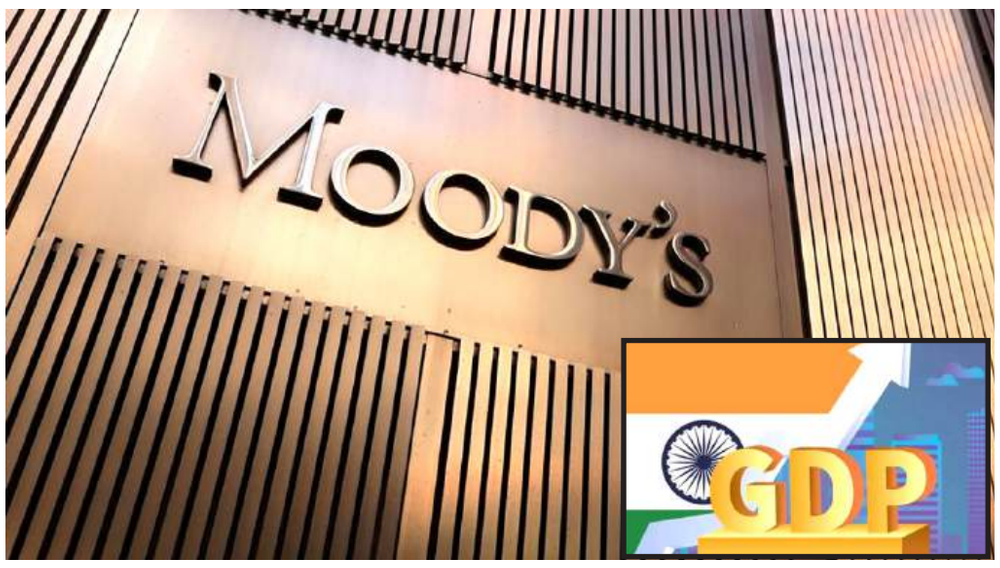
NEW DELHI, 9 FEB

Zydus Lifesciences Ltd on Monday reported a 1.81 per cent rise in consolidated net profit to Rs 1,042.1 crore for the third quarter ended 31 December, 2025, compared with Rs 1,023.5 crore a year earlier. Consolidated revenue from operations rose to Rs 6,864.5 crore from Rs 5,269.1 crore, while total expenses increased to Rs 5,537.6 crore from Rs 4,142.5 crore. The company said a one-time Rs 84.9 crore impact from the new labour code weighed on the quarter. "Our robust performance in 3QFY26 across key businesses reinforces the strength and scalability of our base business," MD Sharvil Patel said. The revenue for the pharmaceutical segment rose to Rs 5,900.3 crore during the third quarter. *—PTI*

India's GDP to grow 6.4% in FY'27, says Moody's

Domestic consumption & policy measures to drive growth

NEW DELHI, 9 FEB



Moody's Ratings on Monday projected India's GDP to grow at 6.4 per cent in FY27, the fastest pace among G-20 economies, driven by strong domestic consumption and policy measures.

Moody's said the banking systems' asset quality will remain resilient, with some stress among micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs). Regardless, banks have sufficient reserves to absorb loan losses, it said.

The operating environment for banks will remain strong in 2026, supported by robust macroeconomic conditions and structural reforms, it said.

"The rationalization of the goods and services tax (GST) and an earlier increase in personal income tax thresholds will help improve affordability for consumers and support consumption-led growth," Moody's said.

The Finance Ministry's Economic Survey estimated 7.4 per cent growth for India in the current fiscal (2025-26), higher than 6.5 per cent growth clocked in 2024-25.

Moody's said with inflation under control and growth momentum remaining strong, Moody's anticipates RBI will further ease monetary policy in fiscal 2026-27 only if there are signs of a slowdown in economic activity.

The Reserve Bank of India has lowered its policy rate by a total of 125 basis points to 5.25 per cent in 2025.

Moody's expects system-wide loan growth to accelerate slightly to 11–13 per cent in fiscal 2026–27, from 10.6 per cent in fiscal 2025-26 YTD.

"Corporate loan quality will remain healthy, supported by strong balance sheets and improved profitability among large companies. Recoveries will taper as banks have resolved stressed loans to large corporate," Moody's said.

It further said that banks will maintain strong capitalization, supported by internal capital generation that keeps pace with asset growth. Banks' funding and liquidity will be stable, with loans growing in line with deposits.

"We continue to expect the government to provide strong support for banks in times of need," Moody's added *—PTI*

SENSEX, NIFTY ADVANCE

Markets soar as India-US trade deal fuels buying

MUMBAI, 9 FEB

Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty extended their gains for the second straight session on Monday, driven by robust buying across all segments after India-US trade deal was finalised.

The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 485.35 points, or 0.58 per cent, to close at 84,065.75. During the day, the benchmark surged 734.28 points, or 0.87 per cent, to hit an intraday high of 84,314.68. The 50-share NSE Nifty appreciated by 173.60 points, or 0.68 per cent, to settle at 25,867.30. During the session, the index climbed 228.55 points, or 0.88 per cent, to hit a high of 25,922.25.

Among the 30-share constituents, State Bank of India, Titan, UltraTech Cement, Tata Steel, Eternal, Bharat Electronics Ltd, Kotak Mahindra Bank, IndiGo, Trent, Mahindra & Mahindra, Larsen & Toubro, Sun Pharmaceuticals, and Asian Paints were the gainers.

On the other hand, PowerGrid, NTPC, ITC, ICICI Bank, Infosys, HDFC Bank, Tech Mahindra, Maruti Suzuki India and Axis Bank were the laggards.

Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Ltd said that an accumulation strategy was observed in consumer durables and real estate stocks following the recent correction, driven by expectations of a demand revival. On the BSE, the Smallcap Select index rose 2.31 per cent, while Midcap Select index went up 1.27 per cent. Among sectoral indices, PSU Bank climbed the most by 2.83 per cent, followed by Consumer Durables (2.76 per cent), Realty (2.64 per cent), and Commodities (2.06 per cent).

3,110 stocks rose, while 1,254 declined and 163 remained unchanged on BSE. *—PTI*

Adani Energy bags Japanese funds for green energy corridor

NEW DELHI, 9 FEB

Adani Energy Solutions (AESL) on Monday said it has secured long-term financing from a consortium of Japanese banks for the 950km Bhadla-Fatehpur, high-voltage direct current transmission project for evacuating green energy.

The project will play a central role in evacuating renewable energy from Rajasthan's solar-rich regions and delivering it into India's national grid, supporting the country's expanding clean power demand, a company statement said.

According to the statement, AESL has secured long-term financing from a consortium of Japanese banks for its flagship high voltage direct current (HVDC) transmission project.

Configured as a high-capacity ±800 kV HVDC network with an evacuation capacity of 6,000 MW, the 950-km corridor will connect Bhadla in Rajasthan to Fatehpur in Uttar Pradesh.

Scheduled for commissioning by 2029, the link is expected to become a critical green transmission artery -- enabling large-scale renewable integration, while strengthening grid stability for some of India's most energy-intensive urban and industrial centers.

Rajasthan remains a key generation hub for Adani Green Energy (AGEL), whose projects already supply clean power to AESL's subsidiary, Adani Electricity Mumbai (AEML). It integrates over 40 per cent renewable energy into its supply mix. *—PTI*

18% TARIFF

India, US trade pact gives tariff certainty to exporters: Experts

NEW DELHI, 9 FEB

The finalisation of a framework for signing a trade pact between India and the US has provided an immediate certainty and predictability to domestic exporters at the tariff front, experts say.

As per the framework, the US will reduce reciprocal tariffs on India to 18 per cent from 25 per cent. The US has already removed the additional 25 per cent punitive tariff which it imposed on India for buying Russian crude.

They said that the tariff on India is the lowest compared to its competitor nations such as China, Indonesia, Vietnam and Bangladesh.

Rudra Kumar Pandey-Partner, Shardul Amarchand Mangaldas Co, said the framework provides much-needed operational clarity on the recent tariff rationalisation.

The framework explicitly confirms that a reciprocal tariff rate of 18 per cent will apply across several key Indian export sectors, including textiles and apparel, leather and footwear, plastics and rubber, organic chemicals, home decor, artisanal products, and selected machinery segments, he said.

"For exporters, this delivers immediate certainty and predictability. Importantly, an 18 per cent tariff places India at a relative advantage vis-a-vis competing exporters ...," Pandey said.

As such, he said, incremental market-share gains for Indian exporters in these segments are expected. *—PTI*

Stalin inaugurates Tata's Rs 9,000 cr TN plant

RANIPET, 9 FEB

MK Stalin takes a test drive of the the Jaguar Land Rover *-PTI*

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin on Monday inaugurated Tata Motors Jaguar Land Rover (JLR) factory at Panapakkam in the district and drove the first Range Rover Evoque car.

The Chief Minister drove the first car with Tata Sons chairman N Chandrasekaran seated beside him for some distance at the manufacturing facility located in the SIPCOT complex, about 90km from Chennai. The plant, which is spread across 470 acres of land, is the first such facility in the country to manufacture JLR's luxury models.

The MoU for the Rs 9,000 crore plant was signed in March 2024, and the foundation stone was laid in September the same year. And the first car rolled out on Monday from the JLR factory, in a significant step towards "Make in Tamil Nadu" initiative.

The plant would generate direct employment to 5,000 persons in the state, state Industries Minister TRB Rajaa said.

Tata Motors had described the initiative as a significant step towards promoting indigenous (Make in India, For the World) manufacturing of its vehicles. *—PTI*

J&K draws Rs 14,948 cr private investment since FY23: Dy CM

JAMMU, 9 FEB

- Choudhury said in 2023-24, 234 units attracted Rs 3,389.37 crore investment and generated 29,969 jobs, while 405 units in 2024-25 brought in Rs 4,145.59 crore investment, creating several

A Deputy Chief Minister Surinder Kumar Choudhary on Monday said Jammu and Kashmir has attracted private investments worth Rs 14,948 crore in past four years, generating employment for 64,515 people in the industrial sector.

Replying to a question by BJP MLA Sunil Bhardwaj in the Legislative Assembly, the Deputy Chief Minister also said said 1,452 industrial units have been set up in Jammu and Kashmir since 2022-23.

Giving details, he said in 2023-24, 234 units attracted Rs 3,389.37 crore investment and generated 29,969 jobs, while 405 units in 2024-25 brought in Rs 4,145.59 crore investment, creating 11,396 jobs.

He said that during 2025-26 till December, 184 industrial units attracted Rs 5,260 crore investment and generated employment for 7,431 persons.

He said multiple policies and schemes had been formulated to attract private investments in the Union Territory.

Choudhary said the government is taking coordinated steps to address investor concerns and create a stable and business-friendly industrial ecosystem in Jammu and Kashmir.

Industrial estates are being upgraded with better roads, drainage, water supply, power infrastructure and common facilities. *—PTI*

Rupee falls 9 paise against US dollar

MUMBAI, 9 FEB

The rupee was down 9 paise at 90.74 (provisional) against the US dollar on Monday, as traders assessed the details of the India-US interim trade framework.

Forex traders said the rupee witnessed high volatility as the support from positive domestic equities and foreign fund inflows was negated by risk-off sentiments among investors.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the rupee opened at 90.66 against the US dollar, then gained some ground to touch 90.37, registering a gain of 28 paise over its previous close.

It, however, erased the gains and touched an intra-day low 90.77. Later the rupee was quoted at 90.74 (provisional), down 9 paise from its previous close. Meanwhile, the dollar index was trading 0.05 per cent lower at 97.58. Sensex and Nifty rose 485.35 and 173.60 points respectively. *—PTI*

APRIL LAUNCH

EPFO app to enable UPI based EPF withdrawl

NEW DELHI, 9 FEB

Retirement fund body EPFO's subscribers will be able to withdraw their employees' provident fund (EPF) directly into their bank accounts through UPI payment gateway using its newly designed mobile application.

The Labour Ministry will launch the application in April this year.

The ministry is working on a project where a certain proportion of the EPF will be frozen, and a large chunk can be withdrawn through their bank account using Unified Payment Interface.

Currently, the members uses either the Universal Account Number (UAN) portal or the UMANG app to access their EPF accounts and avail of their services.

These services will remain available on both platforms, while the new dedicated app will further improve the accessibility and delivery of services for EPFO subscribers.

Subscribers will be able to view the eligible EPF balance in the mobile application and use their linked UPI PIN to complete the transaction.

The EPFO is presently conducting trials using 100 dummy accounts to improve the efficacy of the service and remove any technical glitches that the service may have.

Under the auto-settlement mode, the withdrawal claims are settled electronically without manual intervention within three days of filing the application form.

The limit of this mode has been raised to Rs 5 lakh from the existing Rs 1 lakh.

The system is being developed to avoid this time-consuming process and reduce the burden on EPFO. *—PTI*

Public sector banks post 18% growth in Q3

NEW DELHI, 9 FEB

The public sector banks (PSBs) logged a record cumulative profit of Rs 52,603 crore in the third quarter of the current fiscal, reflecting an 18 per cent year-on-year growth. All 12 PSBs together made a profit of Rs 44,473 crore in the December quarter of FY25.

Thus, the increase in profit in absolute terms was Rs 8,130 crore as compared to the same quarter of the previous financial year.

Market leader SBI alone contributed 40 per cent to the total earnings of Rs 52,603 crore.

SBI posted the highest quarterly net profit of Rs 21,028 crore in Q3 FY26, 24 per cent higher than the same period of the previous fiscal.

Indian Overseas Bank reported the highest net profit growth of 56 per cent to Rs 1,365 crore, followed by Central Bank of India with a 32 per cent rise to Rs 1,263 crore.

All 12 PSBs, except Bank of Baroda, Union Bank of India, Indian Bank, and Bank of India, reported profit growth in single digits.

Banks which reported more than 20 per cent improvement in profit are the Bank of Maharashtra and the Canara Bank. *—PTI*

Scotland beat debutants Italy by 73 runs in T20 WC

Bennet powers Zimbabwe to an 8-wicket win over Oman

KOLKATA, 9 FEB

George Munsey struck a half-century and shared a century opening stand with Michael Jones as Scotland defeated debutants Italy by 73 runs in a T20 World Cup match here on Monday.

Munsey hammered 84 off 54 balls while Jones contributed 37 off 30 deliveries, the duo laying the foundation with a 126-run opening partnership as Scotland posted a strong 207 for 4.

In reply, Italy showed plenty of heart, with Ben Manenti clobbering a 31-ball 52 and brother Harry scoring 37 as the pair shared a 73-run stand for the fourth wicket. However, they were ultimately undone by inexperience and were bowled out for 134 in 16.4 overs.

Scotland off-spinner Michael Leask took 4 wickets for 17 runs to destroy Italy's batting. Italy suffered an injury blow when skipper Wayne Madsen was injured while fielding after diving to stop runs in the fourth over of Scotland's innings. The 42-year-old was in visible pain as he walked off the field, his left arm supported by a makeshift sling fashioned from his jersey.

Brief scores:
Scotland 207 for 4 in 20 overs (George Munsey 84, Michael Jones 37, Brandon MuMullen 41 not out; Grant Stewart 1/21, JJ Smuts 1/38).

Italy 134 in 16.4 overs (Ben Manenti 62; Michael Leask 4/17, Mark Watt 2/24).

Scotland's George Munsey plays a shot during the T20 World Cup cricket match in Kolkata - PTI

The highly rated **Brian Bennett** showed his class on the big stage with an unbeaten 36-ball 48 to complement the bowlers' excellent display and power Zimbabwe to an eight-wicket win over Oman in their T20 World Cup match here on Monday.

Opting to bowl, Blessing Muzarabani wreaked havoc with the new ball before his pace-bowling colleague Richard Ngarava joined him in the demolition job to skittle out Oman for 103.

The duo of Muzarabani (3/16 in 4 overs) and Richard Ngarava (3/17 in 4 overs) were the most successful bowlers for Zimbabwe as Oman put up an ordinary display with the bat. They were in danger of being bowled out for a much lesser total after slipping to 27 for five in the seventh over.

Pacer Brad Evans also chipped in with impressive figures of 3/18 from 3.5 overs in a brilliant Zimbabwean bowling performance.

Zimbabwe made a flying start to the chase courtesy of Tadiwanashe Marumani, who blazed away to 21 off 11 balls before Wasim Ali pulled off a stunning catch to dismiss the opener.

Zimbabwe 106 for 2 (Bennett 48*, Mehmood 2-12) beat Oman 103 (Shukla 28, Muzarabani 3-16, Evans, 3-18, Ngarava 3-17) by eight wickets —*PTI*

BRIAN BENNETT -PTI

Naqvi set to seek Sharif's nod for India match, ICC rejects tri-series with B'desh

LAHORE, 9 FEB

Pakistan Cricket Board chief Mohsin Naqvi is set to request his Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif to withdraw the boycott of their T20 World Cup match against India after being persuaded to do so by his Bangladesh counterpart, a PCB source has revealed.

It is understood that Naqvi had kept a few demands, including resumption of Indo-Pak bilateral cricket and a tri-series involving Bangladesh, to offset the losses that the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) might have incurred after not travelling to India for the global event.

While Indo-Pak bilateral cricket isn't ICC's purview, the demand for a tri-series was summarily rejected. India hasn't played any tri-nation tournament for more than a decade now. However, the ICC might consider awarding the next men's U19 World Cup to Bangladesh.

Naqvi is set to brief Sharif on the latest developments on the issue later on Monday. The game against India is scheduled to be held in Colombo on 15 February. "Naqvi will brief the PM on the communications he has had with the Bangladesh, Sri Lankan, and Emirates cricket boards and with the ICC on the crisis," the source said. —*PTI*

ICC T20 WC MATCHES TOMMORROW

After rattling Pakistan, Netherlands face Namibia in T20 World Cup

After pushing Pakistan to the limit, the Netherlands will test its credentials against a quietly dangerous Namibia when the two associate nations meet in a T20 World Cup Group A clash here on Tuesday ***11 am*** . The Dutch arrive in New Delhi with tangible proof that they can unsettle higher-ranked opposition. After rattling former champions Pakistan in the tournament-opener in Sri Lanka, the Dutch will look to convert that confidence into points when they take on the African nation.

New Zealand eye victory over UAE to consolidate top place in group

New Zealand will be eager to consolidate their top position in Group D with a second successive victory when they face the United Arab Emirates in a T20 World Cup match here on Tuesday ***3 pm***. The Kiwis overcame a dangerous Afghanistan by five wickets on Sunday to garner crucial two points, and would now look to maximise their outing against a relatively easier opponent. The win against the Afghans showcased the utility of New Zealand's long and experienced batting order as they recovered efficiently from a tricky 14 for two while chasing 183 on a slower pitch.

USA, Pakistan eye improvements with bat in another T20 WC showdown

An unpredictable Pakistan will look to exorcise ghosts of the past when they meet a determined USA, 20 months after being handed an infamous defeat by the same opponents, in the T20 World Cup here on Tuesday ***7 pm***. During their World Cup debut in 2024, the USA announced their arrival on the big stage with a memorable victory over Pakistan. Having lost to India in the 2026 opener, the USA would be extra motivated for an encore against Pakistan in an evening game at the Sinhalese Sports Club here.

-PTI

Laporta steps down as Barcelona president

DUBAI, 9 FEB

Joan Laporta has resigned as president of Barcelona in order to seek re-election, launching a 35-day countdown to elections set for 15 March, the club said on Monday. Laporta, who took office in March 2021 after winning 54 per cent of the vote, steps down after nearly five years in charge in line with club statutes. Vice President Rafa will act as president for the next three and a half months. Lawyer Laporta is aiming to reclaim the role at the ballot box and return to office on July 1. He is widely viewed as the favourite against long-time rival Victor Font. Former club executive Xavier and economist Marc Ciria, making his first run in a Barcelona election, have also confirmed their intention to stand as candidates..—*PTI*

-PTI

Winter Olympics: Italy celebrates record six medals

MILAN, 9 FEB

This could turn out to be Italy's best Winter Olympics ever after a record-breaking day on home snow and ice. The host nation picked up six medals on Sunday, the most Italy has ever won in a single day at the Winter Olympics. The breakdown: one silver and five bronze. Ski star Sofia Goggia kicked it off with a bronze medal in the women's downhill, and Lucia Dalmasso was also third in snowboarding's parallel giant slalom. The Italian team won silver in the mixed relay biathlon race, and Riccardo Lorello claimed bronze in the men's speedskating 5,000 meters. The official X account for the Milan Cortina Games proclaimed it to be Italy's best day in Winter Olympics history. And that was before Dominik Fischnaller won bronze in men's singles luge, and before Italy took bronze in the figure skating team event in the evening.—*PTI*

RANJI TROPHY

Rahul's composed century guides Karnataka to semifinal berth

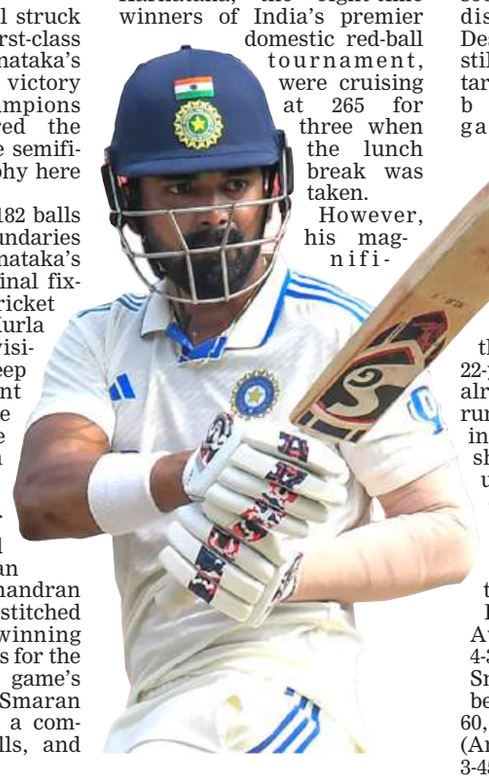
MUMBAI, 9 FEB

India batter KL Rahul struck his 24th hundred in first-class cricket to anchor Karnataka's brilliant four-wicket victory over 42-time champions Mumbai that steered the southern side into the semifinals of the Ranji Trophy here on Monday.

Rahul made 130 off 182 balls with the help of 14 boundaries and a six to set up Karnataka's win in their quarterfinal fixture at the Mumbai Cricket Association Bandra Kurla Complex here. The visitors were chasing a steep 325. The win meant Karnataka would face Uttarakhand in the semifinal in Bengaluru next week.

Rahul, who is a prominent member of the Indian Test and ODI squads, found an able ally in Ravichandran Smaran, as the duo stitched together a match-winning partnership of 147 runs for the fourth wicket on the game's penultimate day. Smaran remained not out on a composed 83 off 123 balls, and struck 11 fours.

Thanks to Rahul's knock, Karnataka, the eight-time winners of India's premier domestic red-ball tournament, were cruising at 265 for three when the lunch break was taken.



However, his magnificent knock came to an end soon after lunch as he was dismissed by Tushar Deshpande. Karnataka was still some distance from the target of 325 at that stage. The big breakthrough gave Mumbai a glimmer of hope as their bowlers Deshande and Tanush Kotian dismissed two more to leave Karnataka at 285 for six and a good 40 runs from the target. However, the 22-year-old Smaran, who has already amassed over 1000 runs in first-class cricket at an incredible average of 69.94, showed great character under pressure and stayed on till Vidyadhar Patil hit the winning run for Karnataka, the second most successful team in the tournament after Mumbai.

Karnataka 173 (Agarwal 92, Awasthi 4-27, Deshpande 4-33) and 325 for 6 (Rahul 130, Smaran 83*, Thakur 2-55) beat Mumbai 120 (Herwadkar 60, Prasidh 3-21) and 377 (Anand 60, Musheer 49, Shetty 3-45) by four wickets —*PTI*

Silver for Manu as Trang clinches 25m pistol gold in thrilling final

NEW DELHI, 9 FEB

Olympic double bronze-medallist Manu Bhaker came agonisingly close to winning a gold, missing out by a whisker in a tense shoot-off as she clinched a silver in the 25m pistol event, while fellow Indian Esha Singh claimed a bronze at the Asian Championship here on Monday.

In one of the most closely-contested events of this edition of the continental championship, both gold medallist Nguyen Thuy Trang and Manu shot an identical 35 in the final, forcing a shoot-off, where the Vietnamese held sway.

In fact, the final turned out to be a battle of nerves, with former Asian air pistol champion Trang, Manu, Esha, and Olympian Rhythm Sangwan all tightly packed and in contention for the top spot.

Esha started with a perfect five in the first series while Manu and Trang hit four. All three Indian shooters were trading the medal positions after each series, but a perfect five in the sixth series saw the Vietnamese take a two-point lead. —*PTI*

Gharami misses an epic triple ton by a run

KALYANI, 9 FEB

Sudip Kumar Gharami produced an innings of his life but fell agonisingly short of a historic triple century as Bengal tightened their grip on the Ranji Trophy quarter-final against Andhra with a commanding first-innings lead, here on Monday.

Rock-solid in defence and tireless in concentration, the 26-year-old opener compiled a monumental 299 off 596 deliveries in a marathon stay that lasted 930 minutes (15 and a half hours) and stretched across three days, only to be bowled by a ball that kept alarmingly low and crashed into his off stump.

The Naihati batter's effort not only rescued Bengal from early trouble but also rewrote the record books. He became the first Indian and only the third batter in first-class cricket history to be dismissed for exactly 299. —*PTI*

All eyes on Sathiyan, Shah-Chitale duo at WTT Chennai

CHENNAI, 9 FEB

Asian Games and Commonwealth Games medallist Sathiyan Gnanasekaran and the top mixed doubles pair of Manush Shah and Diya Chitale will be among the Indian stars to compete in the WTT Star Contender Chennai 2026, beginning here from Tuesday.

Over 80 players from over 15 countries will compete in the main draw across five categories Men's Singles, Women's Singles, Men's Doubles, Women's Doubles, and Mixed Doubles. Thakkar and Shah are the top-seeded men's duo, while Shah and Diya Chitale India's history makers with a title win at the WTT Contender Muscat 2026 will start as top seeds in the mixed doubles. —*PTI*

BWF revamps WT calendar: India Open stays, Syed Modi downgraded

-PTI

KUALA LUMPUR, 9 FEB

The India Open retained its Super 750 status despite the organisational issues this year, but the Syed Modi International was downgraded from Super 300 to Super 100 as the country saw its share of events reduced from four to two in the Badminton World Federation's revamped schedule announced on Monday.

The events axed from the calendar are Super 100 tournaments in Guwahati and Odisha, which were introduced in 2023.

The Syed Modi International, which is held in Lucknow in memory of Commonwealth Games champion Syed Modi, has been a World Tour Super 300 event since 2018. Introduced back in 2009 as a Grand Prix event, it will be one of the eight Super 100 tournaments on the circuit from next year.

The World Body did not specify the reasons for downgrading Syed Modi or omitting the tournaments in Odisha and Guwahati.

The India Open, held in Delhi and upgraded to Super 750 status in 2023, will continue to hold its Grade 2, Level 3 standing. It will remain one of the five Super 750 tournaments in the new 2027-30 cycle. —*PTI*

ASIAN CHAMPIONS LEAGUE TWO

Al-Nassr hopeful Ronaldo will return

RIYADH, 9 FEB

Cristiano Ronaldo has yet to win a major trophy since arriving in Saudi Arabia, and Al-Nassr is hoping the 41-year-old Portuguese star returns to action on Wednesday to help the Riyadh club move closer to silverware.

Al-Nassr faces Arkadag of Turkmenistan, with a place in the Asian Champions League Two quarterfinals on the line, said on Monday

Ronaldo hasn't played any part in Al-Nassr's most recent two games in the Saudi Pro League amid reports he was unhappy with the way the club is being funded, particularly after watching rival Al-Hilal sign Karim Benzema in last month's transfer window.

Al-Nassr, Al-Hilal, Al-Ittihad, and Al-Ahli are all majority owned by Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund.

In a statement, the SPL outlined that no player is bigger than the club or the league.

"The Saudi Pro League is structured around a simple principle: every club operates independently under the same rules," the league said. "Cristiano has been fully engaged with Al-Nassr since his arrival and has played an important role in the club's growth and ambition. But no individual however significant determines decisions beyond their own club."

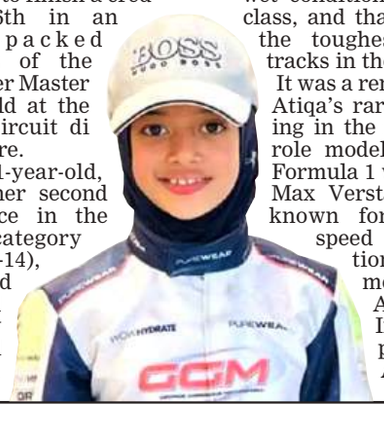
Despite the absence of the five-time Ballon d'Or winner, Al-Nassr beat reigning champion Al-Ittihad 2-0 on Friday.

Ittihad is the only one of three Saudi teams in the top-tier AFC Champions League Elite not to have secured a place in the round of 16, with two group games remaining. —*PTI*

India racer Mir jumps 16 spots in WSK Round 2

SARNO, 9 FEB

Indian racing sensation Atiqa Mir thrived in adversity as she jumped as many as 16 places from the back of a world-class grid to finish a creditable 16th in an action-packed Round 2 of the WSK Super Master Series held at the famous Circuit di Napoli here.



The 11-year-old, only in her second appearance in the junior category (age 12-14), showed speed and maturity beyond her age in the qualifying to set the sixth fastest time in treacherous wet conditions.

What made her qualifying effort special was that this was her first time ever driving in wet conditions in the junior class, and that too on one of the toughest and fastest tracks in the world.

It was a remarkable sign of Atiqa's rare talent, following in the footsteps of her role model and four-time Formula 1 world champion Max Verstappen, who is known for his dazzling speed in wet conditions. It is worth mentioning that Atiqa is the first Indian to be supported by the F1 Academy. —*PTI*